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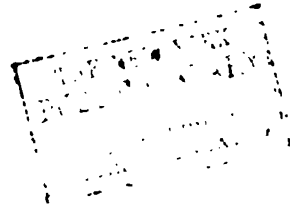
WOOING A WIDOW.



"DON'T YOU AGREE WITH ME, FANNIE?"—*See Page* 7.

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A Story

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

M[illegible] A. ROS[illegible]

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY [illegible]

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WOOING A WIDOW.

A Novel.

BY

EWALD AUGUST KOENIG.

TRANSLATED BY

MARY A. ROBINSON.

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WOOING A WIDOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE PARTING.

"WHAT a pity that this beautiful autumn day is over!" said Colonel von Wartenfels, as, hat and cane in hand, he stood at the window of his cosy sitting-room and looked thoughtfully out into the sunset glow. "Don't you agree with me, Fannie?" he continued, turning toward the pretty girl sitting beside him, who dropped her fancy-work to look up at him.

Her eyes rested with an arch expression upon the tall, well-built figure and the cheerful, honest face of the old gentleman.

"The sunset promises another fine day for to-morrow, uncle dear," she replied, "and we have every reason to hope that a fine autumn will make up to us for the wet, dreary summer we have had."

"You are right, child," he answered, with a nod. "Still, that hope does not lessen my regret. We know the past and the present, but we can never be sure of

the future. Well, I 'll go to the club now and read the papers. There won't be much in them that is agreeable, indeed, but one has to keep up with the times. What is there for supper to-night?"

"A partridge for you, sir," said Fannie, and a roguish smile played around her lips.

The dark eyes of the old retired colonel sparkled. In the most cheerful mood he stroked his long gray mustache.

"Zounds! My favorite dish!" he replied. "How do you manage that with your small household allowance? I hope you do not deprive yourself, so as to give your old *gourmand* of an uncle a pleasure?"

"Make your mind easy," answered the girl, without evading his anxious glance. "You will see that I have my tea with cold meat to-night, as usual."

"And Kurt?" inquired the colonel.

"He will have to share my meal, unless he prefers to go out for his supper."

The old gentleman gave a satisfied nod, and continued to caress his mustache.

"Do you know, Fannie, I should like to be in your brother's place to-night?" he said, and it almost seemed as if a slight sigh accompanied these words. "There will be grand doings at the Rolands'. Oscar Roland knows how to live; and as this is his daughter's wedding, everything will be in style. The groom is a banker too, you know, and the other daughters have made good matches. Roland has provided for all his children now, and so he can well afford to be lavish on such an occasion."

"And yet I hardly think Gustav will enjoy himself there," remarked Fannie, with an expression of serious anxiety.

"Not enjoy himself? Ah, bah, my dear child! Will

not his Dora be there, too? Of course, for her brother, Councillor Heppner, is Roland's son-in-law."

"Certainly she will be present," Fannie interrupted him, with animation. "But you know, uncle, the family disapprove of the engagement. They find it incomprehensible that a young and wealthy widow like Dora should accept a poor cashier."

"Well, even if Gustav has no property, he is a man of honor and capable, ambitious young fellow. With the rich widow's money he can establish a banking-house of his own, and then he will be as good as any of them. Julius Menzel, who is to marry Roland's daughter to-day, is only a beginner in the banking business—that villa in the suburbs which he owns was a present from his father-in-law; so how can they blame Gustav if he opens a new house with his wife's money? I only wish Kurt could make such a match! And if Gustav takes my advice, he will see that the wedding is not delayed too long; his bird is in the bush yet; as long as he hasn't it in hand he can't feel sure of it. Well, I 'll go now. Good-by."

Fannie accompanied him to the door, where he left her with a kindly farewell nod.

His silver spurs clanked softly as he slowly descended the stairs, and the cheery expression of his slightly flushed face indicated that he was content with himself and the world, to which serene state of mind the prospect of the partridge had, probably, in a great measure, contributed.

He had just opened the front door when he found himself face to face with Fanny's brother, who was about to enter the house and appeared to be greatly agitated.

Like Fannie, Gustav Dornberg had a tall, slender figure, light-blue eyes and fair hair. A curly, full

beard framed in his handsome manly face, which just at that moment was deadly pale.

"The deuce, I thought you were at the wedding," said the colonel, fixing his eyes keenly on the young man's disturbed features. "You were invited, were you not?"

"Certainly," replied Gustav, somewhat confused; "but I do not like large assemblies."

"Oho! At your age and with your love of gayety, you avoid a festive gathering of that kind? And when Frau Winkler is to be there, too! What has changed your views so suddenly?"

"Nothing, my dear uncle," answered Gustav, now trying to appear unembarrassed, "I assure you."

"Zounds, old boy, you won't make me believe that," the colonel interrupted him. "Confess now! What has happened?"

Well, Dora is not there either."

"Ah! Not ill, I hope?"

"No, but—"

"But you two have had a quarrel, and so she did not feel like going. Is that it, eh? Tell me the truth! You know how warmly I am interested in your concerns! I suppose the family have been interfering between you again, with their malicious tricks."

"Well, yes," replied Gustav, still very evasively; you have guessed it, and as Dora did not go to the wedding on that account, I sent a refusal too."

The old gentleman struck the pavement vehemently with his cane, contracting his bushy eyebrows angrily.

"You are both of you childish, like all lovers," he said, in a tone of vexation. "How foolish to mind what others say when yourselves know just what you want! Go and have a sensible talk with your sweetheart, get married as soon as possible and snap your

fingers at the family! That is my advice, and no one can give you a better one. You will have no peace until you are man and wife—in face of the incontrovertible fact they will all give in. And now, go upstairs. Fannie is alone; she will give you the same advice and scold you, I hope, into the bargain."

He took leave of the young man with a brief grasp of the hand and walked slowly away.

Gustav gazed after him thoughtfully for a few seconds and then, drawing a deep breath, quickly entered the house.

Fannie looked up in surprise as her brother entered the room.

He threw his hat upon the table and strode quickly toward the window by which his sister was sitting.

"I fear all is over," he said, with a tremor in his voice, after he had seated himself opposite to her and taken both her hands in his. "I cannot hold out any longer against that horde who fight with such dishonorable weapons to rob me of my happiness."

"Good heavens! What has happened?" asked Fannie, in consternation. "You are not at the wedding! And this agitation—"

"Listen to me quietly and everything will be clear to you," continued Gustav. "You know Dora's connections have opposed me from the first. I have heard many an unpleasant word from my chief and Councillor Heppner; but Dora laughed at that and assured me again and again that her brother and his relations would never succeed in undermining her affection for me. I trusted in that, but lately it has seemed to me as if there was a change. Dora was reserved, taciturn and out of sorts; she evaded my anxious questions, grew more and more irritable, and I could no longer doubt that I had been slandered to her."

"And you told me nothing about this?" said Fannie, reproachfully.

"What was there to tell? It is not my way to sigh and complain if Fate threatens to do me an ill turn. I asked Dora's companion for the cause of her irritability. Ernestine shrugged her shoulders—"

"That I could have told you beforehand!" Fannie interrupted him, eagerly, with flashing eyes. "I never had the least confidence in Frau Hennig. I have always suspected her of working against you."

"I think you are mistaken," replied Gustav. "Ernestine is an unfortunate woman and entirely dependent on Dora. Well, last night Dora asked me if I had any debts. The question came so suddenly that it embarrassed me. 'Dear me, my trifling debts are not worth mentioning!' I answered in the negative. Then she dropped a remark about abuse of confidence and outraged love, and finally told me that she had declined the Rolands' invitation to the wedding, because she did not feel in the mood to take part in the festivity. In vain I asked her for an explanation; she remained silent, and when I left her, I carried away with me the depressing fear that a breach was at hand. This morning I told Roland that I was obliged to retract my acceptance of his invitation, as I was prevented by circumstances from attending the wedding. He laughed maliciously, and remarked that I could do nothing better than resign my ambitious plans and hopes; that I ought to have foreseen that Frau Winkler would dismiss me as soon as she recognized my true motives in wishing to marry her. Give me a cigar, Fannie; the old colonel won't object."

The girl rose and moved a smoking-table to the window; then she took from the cupboard a decanter and

a glass, which Gustav, after she had filled it, emptied at a draught.

"You can imagine that I did not let such insulting rudeness pass in silence," he continued in a bitter tone. "We had some hot words, and I told him various truths which can hardly have been pleasant for him. It is not well to speak too plainly to a knave if you do not wish to draw his hatred and his enmity upon you; but I could not do otherwise—his insolence had irritated me too deeply. Things took the turn they could not help taking; the result was that I resigned my position."

"Oh, Gustav, your good position?" cried Fannie, in alarm, while her eyes rested with a look full of anxiety and yet of warm sympathy on her brother's pallid face. "Were you not too hasty? I don't mean to say you could not easily find another place, but—"

"I hardly think I shall look for another here," he interrupted her. "The matter must be decided to-day; either we shall be reconciled, or I shall leave this place forever. Dora has written to me; I received the letter an hour ago. She reproaches me with having sought her hand not for herself, but on account of her money, and declares that she can no longer believe in the strength and purity of my love. She gives me back my promise and requests me to release her from hers, and all this has come upon me like a thunderbolt. I cannot think who or what is the cause of it all; I can only conjecture that I have been calumniated outrageously."

With trembling hand he refilled the little glass and emptied it; then arose and paced to and fro with long strides.

"Who or what can be the cause of it!" repeated Fannie thoughtfully, while her eye followed her brother. "Did you not say some time ago that it seemed to you as if Herr Sonnenberg were trying to oust you!"

"Sonnenberg?" he asked, standing still. "I cannot believe that Dora could find anything to like in that dandified humbug."

"He is made much of by the Roland family, is he not?"

"Certainly, they are well matched," replied Gustav, scornfully. "Sonnenberg, with his noble great-grandfather, whose rusty coat of arms he intends to polish up, and with his rich uncle in Silesia, whose sole heir he pretends to be! In my opinion he is nothing but a soldier of fortune, who lives by gambling and the leniency of his creditors. And they pretend that Dora prefers such a man to me? I cannot believe that."

"If Frau Roland and the Councillor patronize him, then—"

"Let them do so. Sonnenberg is an adventurer."

"And such people are the most dangerous rivals," warned Fannie in an anxious tone. "It may be, too, that Frau Hennig is in league with him. I never trusted her. From the first, I did not approve of Dora's choice of a companion. Her malicious eyes repelled me at once."

"Well, I cannot complain of her," answered Gustav, shrugging his shoulders, as he paced to and fro restlessly; "she has always been very friendly and obliging to me. If there was ever a difference of opinion between me and Dora she invariably took my part."

"She had not been with Dora long when Sonnenberg began to frequent the house. Have you never discovered any understanding between those two?"

"Never, Franciska. On the contrary, I am convinced that they were perfect strangers to each other, nor do I believe that the calumny comes from that quarter. I rather think that my chief and his lady have managed that business, particularly the latter, who never can

carry her head high enough. I suppose they want to induce Dora to give the care of her property to Roland, and in that plan I am in their way. I could make that out by the sneering remarks with which the old man overwhelmed me this morning. That is their only reason, and Dora seems, unfortunately, to have fallen into the trap which has been set for us. Madame Pauline Roland is the soul of all these intrigues, just as she is the soul of her whole family. They all have to dance to her fiddle."

"And what do you intend to do now?" asked the young girl, looking up at him, full of anxious expectation. "If you think best that I should call on Dora to ask her for an explanation and to justify you, I am ready to do so at once, and I promise you to do my utmost to clear up this misunderstanding and set you right in her eyes."

"No, Fannie; I must go myself. No third party ought to interfere between us. I will stand face to face ith her and ask her who has slandered me."

"And if you find that the breech between you cannot be healed?"

"That seems impossible. But if it should be so, I shall leave town this very night."

"And where will you go?"

"No matter where, so long as it is not here," he replied in a gloomy tone, as he stopped by the window and stared out into the increasing twilight.

"Here I should have to be prepared for scorn and ridicule," he continued. "I might be forced to see Dora the wife of another man, and that I could not endure. It is all the same whether I give up my position to-day or to-morrow, and I should be obliged to do so to-morrow if my engagement with Dora is broken to-night."

"And if it should be so, does that do away with the possibility of a future reconciliation?" asked Fannie. "People often change their mind over night, and who knows but what Dora may recall you to-morrow. It is not well to be over-hasty, Gustav; we often do things in our first excitement that we would gladly make undone in a very short time."

"I know Dora better than that; she has taken plenty of time to consider her decision well, and if it is once made she will not soon repent of it," said Gustav. "Whatever she once makes up her mind to she adheres to with stubborn obstinacy."

"That may be, but can you believe that her love was a lie? And if it was not, nothing can kill it; it will revive."

"If that should happen, Dora can follow me or call me back and I will forgive and forget everything. You can tell her that when I am gone; she will understand that I cannot remain here if she gives me up."

"The city is so large—"

"Not large enough for Dora's ways and mine to lie apart, if we both live in it. I should probably daily seek and find an opportunity of seeing her, and daily tear open anew the wound in my heart. No, the sea will have to lie between us if I am to try to forget her," he continued, in a low voice, "and even across the sea her image will go with me and remind me every hour of my lost happiness. It might be different if I were not obliged to come in contact with these people who bear me such ill will—if I did not know that they will be only too glad to take this opportunity of scoffing at me. That I could not submit to; and if, at such a moment, I should lose my self-control, something might happen that I should regret bitterly. And it is imma-

terial, after all, whether I seek a new position here or elsewhere."

"And you do not consider me in the matter at all?" said Fannie, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"I do, indeed, Fannie; but you are the only one who will miss me. And you are so well cared for here with the old colonel, our dear father's faithful friend, to whom we both owe so much gratitude. He could not do without you, his trusty housekeeper, and if Kurt should marry, the old man will have only you to lean on; for, as I know him, he will never sacrifice his independence and submit to the caprices of a daughter-in-law. Thus I am certain of your being well provided for, even if you should not marry, which is not impossible; and that certainly makes it easier for me to leave you."

"Had you not better consult with the colonel on the matter first?"

"No," he replied very decidedly. "What advice could he give me? When one has reached thirty, as I have, one should be able to decide and act for one's self, and, besides, I am very much in doubt whether the old soldier would understand me. He is used to going straight ahead. In my place he would probably challenge Roland, and I cannot see what good that would do. No, I repeat that this difference can be adjusted only between Dora and myself, and unless the end should be better than I fear, my resolve is taken."

"And do you mean to say," asked Fannie, "that I shall not see you again if you decide to leave?"

"I cannot give you an answer now, Franciska!"

"But I must have it, Gustav! Why this haste? If you start to-morrow or the day after, it will be soon enough. And you owe it to the colonel to ask his advice; you can follow it or not, as you please."

"What shall I say?" he replied evasively. "The carrying-out of my resolve, of course, depends upon the result of my interview with Dora, and the decision itself would not be altered by the colonel's advice. I came here to tell you all this, so that you may know what has become of me if you should hear of my sudden departure to-morrow. In that case I wish you to tell the colonel and Kurt what I have confided to you, and Dora as well, if she should ask you."

"Let me speak to her before you go," said his sister, urgently.

"Why? I am too proud to beg for her love if she can no longer trust me. If she does not believe my words, it would be useless for you to try to convince her, and I should degrade myself if I were to let you plead for me in that case. It is quite possible, however, that my fears are groundless. I cannot help hoping that Dora will believe me and retract her letter, and then all will end well. If so, I shall urge her to fix the earliest day possible for our marriage, so that there will be an end to all these intrigues."

While he spoke thus, he had filled the little glass again, and was about to lift it to his lips when Fannie laid her hand on his arm so hastily that the contents of the glass were spilled over his coat.

"Don't drink any more," she pleaded. "It only excites you, and in the hard conflict which you have before you, you need above everything to be calm."

Gustav silently replaced the glass upon the table; he sighed deeply.

"If I go away I will write to you as soon as possible," he said, after a pause. "I hope, however, to see you again to-morrow morning, perhaps even to-night. It would be a triumph for me, too, if I could tell my chief to-morrow that those malicious intrigues had

been frustrated by Dora's love. So we will hope for a happy meeting, Fannie dear."

She threw her arms about his neck and looked deep into his eyes with affectionate anxiety.

"God grant it!" she said, with emotion. "Do not be too hasty, brother. Promise to come to me once more in any case."

"I can promise nothing. Let me do as I think best. Whatever may happen, I shall know how to find the right way."

He kissed her forehead and, smiling, gave her a last nod. Then he quickly left the room, and breathed more freely as he stepped out into the street.

"That is over!" he said to himself. "It may have been useless to tell her all that and make her heart heavy; but I cannot be sure how this misunderstanding may end, and it is but right that she should be prepared."

He had to go quite a distance to reach the residence of his betrothed, and at one time he thought of taking a cab which passed slowly by; but the agitation of his mind made him feel the need of bodily exercise, and he, therefore, continued his way on foot.

The street-lamps were just being lit; his eyes followed the man who attended to that business, and with a certain feeling of suspense he awaited the moment when light would appear in the next lamp.

Several acquaintances whom he met bowed to him, but he did not notice it; in the crowded streets through which he had to pass, he frequently came into collision with persons who were hastening past him.

He took no notice of this either, and when, on one occasion, he stopped before the brilliantly lit window of a book-store, he stared at the books exhibited in it without reading their titles.

Dora's reproach that he had sought her hand merely for her money and not from love was terrible to him; it contained an insult which outraged his feelings and made his blood boil.

No one besides himself knew how true and fervent, how unselfish his love was, and it was this most sacred of all feelings which those creatures were trying to drag down into the mud!

That Roland should do so did not surprise him; he knew the weak character of that man, who was obliged to yield implicit obedience to his despotic and intriguing wife; but he could not understand how Dora could have been led to make that terrible accusation and to give him back his word in consequence.

What had happened to convince her of the justice of that reproach? She must have had proofs furnished her, but where had those proofs been obtained?

He revolved those questions in his mind without being able to find an answer for them, and had not yet solved the riddle when he entered the house in which Dora occupied the whole of the first floor.

A wide glass door separated that story from the main hall of the house. Gustav rang the bell softly, and the door was opened by an old, morose-looking maid-servant.

"I don't think they expect you," said she, in a low voice; "but it would be a blessing for us all if you could bring back peace to this house."

"I have done nothing to disturb it, Katherine," he replied, in a similar tone. "Others are to blame who are trying to separate us."

"I know that very well," said she, with a nod, casting a look of hatred toward the door of the drawing-room; "we have the serpent under our own roof."

"Ernestine?"

"Hush! I did not mean to say anything. What good would any words of mine do? For I can't prove anything, Herr Dornberg, and you must not call upon me as a witness; we should both only make fools of ourselves. You must rely upon yourself; but at some future time, when the storm is over, be sure and crush the serpent's head so that it cannot bite any more."

She led the way, and knocked at the drawing-room door; the next moment he stood in an elegant, luxuriously furnished apartment, in the presence of his betrothed.

Dora Winkler was not a striking beauty, but she was, nevertheless, very fair and lovely. Her rich, heavy hair, of a deep, bluish black, framed in her broad forehead. Beneath her delicate eyebrows, which almost met in the middle, her dark eyes sparkled vivaciously. Her slightly aquiline nose reminded one of the proud beauties of the south. Her small mouth, with its pouting lips, seemed made to be kissed; and the dimples in her rosy cheeks and round chin gave her face an expression of childlike archness, which only heightened the charm of all these attractions.

She wore a close-fitting dress of pearl-gray silk, which showed off the elegant curves of her well rounded figure, thus presenting a direct contrast to the angular form of another lady, who was negligently reclining in an easy-chair in the background of the room.

Ernestine Hennig, Dora's companion, had a tall, ungraceful figure, one of the kind which is designated by the term "hop-pole."

Blond hair, smoothly parted over the forehead, framed in her pale, narrow face, which might have been called that of a martyr, if the blue-gray eyes had not been so sharp and so penetrating.

At this moment, too, those eyes were resting with a

lurking expression upon Gustav, who, hat in hand, slowly approached the divan on which Dora had seated herself.

"I have received your letter, Dora," he said, in a low tone. "How is it possible that you can make such accusations against me?"

Ernestine had risen. A hardly perceptible mocking smile played around her lips for a moment.

"You will excuse me if I leave you," she said, in a gentle voice. "This interview—"

"No, no, stay, I beg of you," Dora interrupted her, in a sharp tone. "Whatever I have to say to this gentleman you may and shall hear; I have no secrets from you. I did not expect that you would come in person to make an attempt to justify yourself," she continued, turning to Gustav, whose pulses were flying as in a fever. "You must know yourself that my accusations are well founded."

"No, Dora—"

"And I say yes!" she went on, in a passionate tone. "Do you remember the words you spoke to me when you asked my hand?"

"How could I ever forget them?" he replied. "If you remembered them as distinctly as I do, you would never have listened to the slanders against me."

"On the contrary, it was just because I had such a distinct recollection of them that the discoveries which I made were so deeply painful to me," said Frau Winkler, her eyes flashing with indignation. "What was it that you said on that occasion? That you loved me for myself alone; that my wealth had no attraction for you; that you would not love me any less if I were a beggar."

"That is the truth, Dora."

A scornful smile passed over her lovely face, and her

eye rested for a moment on her companion as if she wished her to express her opinion on the subject.

"The truth?" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "As if you had a right to say that you had never been guilty of a falsehood toward me!"

"Dora!" cried Gustav, indignantly.

"Do not call me that; you have no longer the right to do so! What did you answer me when, a few days ago, I asked you whether you had any debts?"

"Nothing but the truth," he replied in a bitter tone. "The small, insignificant claims which I have still outstanding cannot be called debts. And, moreover, that was a question which could not but strike me unpleasantly—a man can have debts and yet be honorable; his worth should not be measured by such things."

Dora had risen. She went to the dainty writing-desk, which stood near the window, and took a paper out of one of its drawers.

"I will not contest the truth of that remark," she said, coldly. "Every man may have debts; they do not dishonor him if they were caused by imperative circumstances. And even when they are the result of levity I could overlook them, only they should be confessed frankly, for whatever one feels obliged to conceal is always dishonorable."

The hot blood mounted to Gustav's forehead; he drew himself up to his full height, the quivering of his lips betokened the storm which raged within him.

"This reproach to me?" he cried passionately. "Who has calumniated me to you in this outrageous manner? Answer me, Dora; I demand frankness from you, too! Tell me the names of the persons and I will stand face to face with them in your presence and tell them that they are liars. Is it not the Rolands, who, aided by

your brother, interfere between us? Have I not warned you often enough against those intriguers?"

"My brother Heinrich is a man of honor!" interrupted Dora, with asperity. "His warnings against you date as far back as our engagement, and I now recognize how well founded they were. And I must tell you, besides, that the Roland family have never had the slightest influence over my decisions. I am in the habit of judging for myself. That, at least, is one thing which I learned during the short period of my marriage. And I never base my opinion upon what I learn by hearsay. I judge only when I have convincing proofs before me."

"I suppose I have a right to demand those proofs in my case."

"You shall have them, Herr Dornberg," continued Dora, unfolding the paper she held in her hand. "Can you deny that you wrote this promissory note?"

Gustav turned pale. His eyes were fixed upon the note, which crackled softly in Dora's trembling hand.

"No," he said, in a low voice; "I had not thought of *that*."

"And do you expect to justify yourself by that lapse of memory?" asked she, sarcastically. "Perhaps you have also forgotten the words which you wrote. Listen, then:

"'This is to certify that I have received from Jacob Goldmann, of this city, one thousand and five hundred thalers cash, as a loan, and that I promise to repay that sum, with interest at the rate of six per cent., beginning from this date, before the expiration of a year, or, at the latest, immediately after my marriage with Frau Winkler.'

"These are the words of the note. And now I ask you what would you yourself call a man who, on the same day on which he engages himself to a lady, makes use of that lady's name to obtain a loan from a money-

lender? I remind you once more that you told me on that day that you loved me for myself alone. In the same hour in which you told me that lie—"

"Stop!" cried Gastav in the most passionate excitement. "It was not a lie. I could say the same words to you at this present hour, without suffering the slightest reproach from my conscience!"

"A bold assertion!" she replied, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders. "But, indeed, there is nothing left to you but a bold denial. Would Goldmann have lent you the money if you had been about to marry a poor girl? Yes, your engagement to me was the best security, and you did not hesitate to make use of it."

"Well, then, if I did do so I did not do it for myself," he said, and his voice sounded firm and calm once more. "Unfortunately, this is the only explanation which it is in my power to give you; it would suffice you, Dora, if the loving trust you once had in me had not been shaken by calumny. I admit that it was wrong to make use of your name in that way, but Goldman insisted on having that condition inserted in the note, and I was obliged to have the money that day; not for myself, Dora, I repeat. And Goldman had promised secrecy on his word of honor."

"Does all that alter the fact, which could not but insult me deeply and outrage my most sacred feelings?" interrupted Dora, while another flash of anger fell upon him from her dark eyes. "How can you still dare speak of your love? That love was a lie. You looked upon your marriage with me as a profitable stroke of business, which would insure you credit for the present and an agreeable mode of existence in the future."

Gustav started, as if he had received an electric shock. From his eyes, too, there flashed so vehement

a wrath that Dora retreated in alarm, and Ernestine Hennig rose to protect her mistress.

"Those are not your own thoughts!" he said, in a hoarse voice. "That was the language by which calumny has urged you on against me. They have spied on me in order to find something which they could make use of to stain my honor. I can imagine their triumph when they discovered the note. Goldmann has broken his word; if I were to do likewise you would think differently about this loan, and probably forgive me for having used your name for it; but I dare not do it. Honor demands that I should sacrifice even the happiness which I hoped to find in a union with you. If the money-lender had been aware of that which I am forced to conceal from you, he would probably have sold that secret as well to your spies, but I doubt whether they would have told you of it. I can only entreat you, Dora, to give me back your old confidence and to believe in the fervency and honesty of my love," he continued, in a gentler, beseeching voice. "I adjure you, by the memory of the happy hours we have spent together, do not listen to those calumnies; let us cleave to each other firmly and faithfully, and then no one can rob us of our happiness!"

Dora was silent.

Those pleading words seemed to have made some impression upon her; the sound of that sonorous voice, to which she had so often listened with delight, once more wove its spell around her.

"Love can forgive everything but treachery," remarked Ernestine, in a hard voice.

"True, only too true!" said Dora, with a sigh, passing her hand over her forehead, as if to dispel dreams that were hovering around her. "I have trusted and have been deceived—deceived in a way which no woman

can ever forgive or forget. A shameful trade has been carried on with my name and with my love. That memory can never be effaced from my mind, and has raised a barrier which will separate us henceforward. I do not believe in your secret, Herr Dornberg. It is only a pretext behind which you try to conceal your own levity."

"May heaven forgive you that unjust accusation!" he replied, casting a wrathful glance at the companion. "You would not make it if you listened to the voice of your own heart alone."

Ernestine had approached the writing-desk. Upon it there lay, beneath the marble statuette of a Cupid, some imitations of bank-notes. She took up one of these and burned it slowly at the lamp. A delicate perfume, which arose from the burning paper, filled the whole room.

"Excuse me," said the companion, in her calm, monotonous voice, turning to Dora. "You must have noticed the smell of brandy. It was growing insupportable."

The blood mounted to Gustav's face. He, too, observed for the first time that his coat smelled of the brandy which had been spilled over it, and remembered how much Dora disliked that odor, because it reminded her of her first husband's habit of drinking.

But he also remembered the warnings of his sister and the old servant, and at that moment a glowing hatred of Ernestine arose in his bosom.

"I thank you for directing Dora's attention to the matter," he said, with cutting sarcasm. "May I be permitted to ask how much you have been paid for assuming such a contemptible part?"

"I do not think, Dora, that it is my duty to reply to this insult?" remarked Ernestine, coldly, as she turned

her back on the young man. "It is easily understood that vexation and disappointment at the failure of a business venture may turn a man's brain, and I pity every one who is unfortunate. But, if you should think it necessary to take my part, please tell this gentleman how often and how earnestly I have defended him, until I was at last myself convinced by the proofs of his guilt. Tell him that I never allow myself to be bribed by any one whatever; that I despise gold and riches of any kind, and that my sole wish is to see you happy."

"If Herr Dornberg has not discovered that yet, having had sufficient time and opportunity to test your character and your sentiments, he would not believe my words," replied Dora, shaking her head sadly. "No one stands between us two. It is only his abuse of my love and confidence that parts us, and that barrier can never be removed. You used my name as a security," she continued, taking the note from the table; "I will not deceive the hopes which you built upon it. You will see that I have canceled the debt. I should have done so at any rate, because, if Mr. Goldmann had advanced his claim in the usual way, my name would have been made public. At the same time with this note I have redeemed my word, which I had pledged to you. Leave me, now. All is over between us."

She had torn up the note, and thrown the pieces at his feet; and, as she now stood before him, proud and unapproachable, her upper lip raised defiantly and her glance fixed upon him in icy coldness, he could not but recognize that any farther attempt at reconciliation would prove utterly vain.

"Is that your last word?" he asked, in an unsteady voice.

"My last," she replied. "I am not aware of anything I could add."

"Ask heaven to forgive you then, Dora. It is not my happiness alone but your own as well that you have thus ruthlessly destroyed. You will realize this some day, when regret shows you what you have lost and how grossly you have been deceived by those who have estranged you from me under the mask of friendship."

He took the engagement-ring from his finger and laid it on the table. Once more his eyes rested with an expression of deepest sorrow on the object of his love. Then, drawing a deep breath, he took up his hat.

"So the dream is at an end," he continued, in a low voice. "This, too, must be borne, and I think I shall be able to bear it without succumbing to it. It was your wish; remember that, when the time of remorse and of self-reproach comes. With regard to this debt, you will have to give me time to cancel it. I had not instructed you to pay Goldmann. You did so, nevertheless, and, as you say, from personal interest. Now, I am your debtor—"

"I waive all claim to repayment," she interrupted him, coldly.

He drew himself up. Once more a flash of anger fell from his eyes, not only upon Dora, but also on the face of Ernestine, which wore a sarcastic smile.

"Do you think that you still have the right to offer me a gift?" he asked indignantly. "I reject it most decidedly, and hope I may be able to send you the money very soon. Farewell! You told me my love had been a lie; I can only return that accusation!"

A slight bow and he disappeared through the drawing-room door, and it seemed at first as if Dora were about to recall him, for, as if animated by a sudden resolve, she stepped rapidly forward.

Ernestine, who had watched every movement of her

mistress, hastily passed in front of her and laid her hand on her arm.

"No weakness," she said, in a warning tone. "You would degrade yourself by it. What is done must remain done, and if, formerly, I defended that man against your reproaches, I am now quite sure that he really does not deserve your love."

Dora's eyes were still fixed upon the door; the vehement heaving of her bosom alone betrayed the struggle that was going on within her.

"What if he could justify himself after all?" she sighed. "What if it were true that his word of honor forbids him?"

"Do you still believe those idle tales? That was nothing but a pretext; when he saw that it could not help him, he accused me and your friends of malicious intrigues. Why, if he need not blush at that debt did he so boldly deny it? Oh, I know men, Dora, and I should think you might know them, too, for we both have unhappy marriages to look back upon. He did not dare to confront you and answer your reproaches in a sober state; he had to draw courage for that from liquor. And it is to such a man that you would even now intrust your happiness? I repeat I have defended him heretofore, but now I feel it my duty, as your friend, to warn you against him!"

Dora silently picked up the pieces of the torn note and laid them in one of the drawers of her writing-desk, which she locked as carefully as if she had confided to it a treasure of great value.

"He was right; my happiness too is destroyed," she said in a trembling voice; "I feel only now how dear he was to me."

"All the worse for him, then, that he himself has killed that love, of which he was unworthy," Ernestine

interrupted her, with calm gravity. "You will forget him when some other man—"

"Never!" cried Dora, passionately, raising her hand as if to take an oath. "I can never love another man after having been deceived by him. Leave me alone. I do not wish even you to see my grief and my tears. Good night!"

Somewhat taken aback, Ernestine gazed after her mistress as she vanished behind the velvet *portière*.

"Bah! Nothing but words," she said to herself, while a mocking smile passed over her thin face; "she needs only a few days of rest. She is very young yet, and the young forget quickly."

She looked at the clock, lit a candle, extinguished the lamp and retired to her bedroom.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERRUPTED FESTIVITY.

The banking-house of Oscar Roland was not one of the most prominent firms of the city; but it had, nevertheless, a very good reputation on 'Change as well as in the commercial world.

Roland had lived in great style for the past few years, chiefly, as gossip had it, to secure husbands for his daughters.

If this had been indeed the aim of his lavishness, he could now congratulate himself on having reached it.

Marie, the oldest daughter, had become the wife of Councillor Heppner, Dora's brother, and rumor asserted that she was quite as despotic as her mother.

Eugenie, the banker's second daughter, was married to an English wool-merchant. Louise had followed her husband to Vienna, and Léonie, the youngest, had this day married Banker Julius Menzel, of whom little was known, except that he carried on, in one of the chief thoroughfares of the city, a small money-changing business, with a show-case full of foreign bank-notes and gold pieces, and owned a pretty villa in the suburbs, with which Roland had presented his daughter soon after her engagement.

The wedding had been celebrated at Roland's residence, only the family and some intimate friends having been invited. The young couple had, toward evening, started on the customary journey, and the majority of the guests had taken their leave soon after.

The banker, a small, spare man with a bald head and thin red whiskers, the sly expression of whose face reminded one of a fox, moved rapidly through the elegant, handsomely decorated apartments in which the entertainment had taken place.

Here and there, as he thought necessary, he would give a hint to the servants in waiting, or he would stop at one table or another to drink a glass of champagne or exchange a few words with one of his guests.

The few friends who had remained had divided into groups in order to play a game of cards or to have a cosy chat over a bottle of wine. To the banker's evident gratification, they all seemed to cherish the praiseworthy intention of not going home before midnight.

One of these groups had been formed in the boudoir of the mistress of the house, which lay at the end of the suite, and was most charmingly and tastefully furnished.

Frau Roland, tall and slender, with hair of a reddish blond, energetic features and steel-gray, piercing eyes, presided over the little company, seated on a blue-damask divan. Her daughter, Frau Heppner, who bore a striking resemblance to her mother, even to the color of her hair and eyes, was pouring coffee for the gentlemen present.

Fat little Councillor Heppner sat in an easy-chair and listened to every word that was spoken. He, too, was bald. Every wrinkle, every feature of his well-fed and carefully shaven face expressed curiosity, which was his weak point, and at the same time his lively blue

eyes looked around cheerily, as if they wanted to assure every one that the councillor was in the happiest of moods.

Next to him, beside the lady of the house, Herr Theodor Sonnenberg had seated himself, a tall, slender gentleman of about thirty.

His exterior could be called attractive; there was something aristocratic in his carriage and his whole demeanor, and his pale, interesting face, with those unfathomable dark eyes and a flowing black beard, possessed an irresistible charm for all the ladies.

There were two or three other gentlemen in the little company, a broker and two merchants, but they were so conscious of their insignificance beside Theodor Sonnenberg and the ladies of the house, that they modestly kept in the background of the room. This group was now joined by the banker, who took a chair and asked his daughter for a cup of coffee.

"How restless you are to-night, papa," said the councillor's wife, facetiously, as she fulfilled his request.

"Yes, indeed," remarked her husband, in his vivacious manner. "I noticed it, too. What 's the matter, papa? Anything in particular?"

"Nothing," replied Roland, laconically, stirring his coffee. "Only when you give an entertainment like this you have to keep your eyes open."

"H–m, the oftener you peep into corners, on such occasions, the more you have to wink at things," said his son-in-law, shrugging his shoulders. "And you can't always snatch a bottle from a servant's mouth or pull the game that he has appropriated from between his teeth. It 's 'live and let live' at such times."

"I agree with you," replied the banker, calmly. "But just to-night there are a number of people in the house whom I was obliged to engage as attendants

without knowing anything about them; and although I have no reason to suspect the honesty of any one of them, I still feel somewhat anxious in thinking of the large amount of money which I have downstairs."

"Good gracious! How much is it?" asked the councillor, fixing his inquisitive eyes expectantly upon his father-in-law. "You haven't been winning in a lottery, have you? I assure you that we all, and I in particular, should be delighted."

"I dare say," replied Roland, setting his empty cup on the table; "but, unfortunately, I can't give you that pleasure. You ask how much money there is? Well, if I include my balance in hand, there must be about two hundred thousand thalers."

"The deuce, that is a good deal!" said Heppner, with a nod.

"And do you keep such an amount in the house over night?" asked Frau Roland, reproachfully. "You must excuse me if I call that very careless."

"I suppose the money is in a fire-proof and burglar-proof safe?" inquired Theodor Sonnenberg, carelessly toying with his gold eyeglass, which hung across his white vest by a broad black ribbon.

"Of course," replied the banker. "However, my wife is right; it is always imprudent to keep so large a sum in the house over night. Something might happen, and then I am the one who would be held responsible for the loss. Unfortunately, however, it could not be helped to-day. I received the money this noon when I was just about to dress for the wedding, and had no time to dispose of it. I could not refuse the payment, either. It was made by order of Baron Busse, for whom I am to invest the amount in government bonds."

"The deuce! Has the rich baron made so much by his harvest this year?" asked the councillor.

"Hardly," was the reply; "but he has sold Meadowvale, one of his estates, because it was too far away from here, and he had to leave its management to his stewards, who were only too glad of the opportunity to better themselves. The Baron Busses have done business with us for years," he continued, drawing himself up proudly. "We have always attended to their money matters, and I think we may feel proud of the confidence shown us by so wealthy and distinguished a family."

"Why?" asked Frau Roland, tossing her head with a supercilious air. "They have never loaned our house any money, nor taken any part in its business. They have only used it as a medium when they wanted to invest their property in government bonds. Even if that were a proof of special confidence, I cannot see why we should be grateful for it. You will buy the bonds to-morrow and pay the money for them. You will charge your commission and give the papers to the baron, and then the business will be ended."

The broker and the two merchants, toward whom the speaker turned her piercing eyes at the last words, nodded assent. Even the councillor deemed it advisable to agree with his mother-in-law.

Roland knew from experience that he ought to yield to the opinion thus expressed and drop the subject.

"It is hardly probable that anything will go amiss in this house before to-morrow morning," remarked Frau Heppner, after a pause, in a conciliating tone, as she replenished the cup timidly handed her by the broker.

"How could it possibly?" asked Sonnenberg, quietly. "If a fire should break out, the money would remain unharmed in the fire-proof safe, and a burglary seems out of the question."

"Well, there are said to be thieves enough in town

who could easily pick the most complicated lock," observed Roland.

"'Hardly so quickly," replied Sonnenberg, with a skeptical smile. "I will by no means deny, however, that such burglaries do take place."

"One was committed here quite recently," Frau Roland interrupted him.

"You are right, madam, I remember the case; but if you know the facts, you will admit that things were made very easy for the thieves. Has your safe a combination-lock, Herr Roland?"

"No, it is an old-fashioned one with a simple snap-lock. Whoever has the key can open it without difficulty."

"Yes, I have noticed it in your cash-room. How many keys have you to it?"

"Three! My cashier has one, I have another and the third, sealed up in a small package, is in the drawer of my writing-desk."

"In your writing-desk?" asked Frau Roland, astonished. "Could not the key be stolen from that drawer?"

"Pshaw, no one but myself knows of its being there!"

"I think I would put it elsewhere," said the councillor, shaking his head. "Give it to mamma, it will be safer in her money-box."

"There is such a thing as being too cautious in such matters," remarked Sonnenberg, while the broker and the merchants, after bowing low to the ladies, left the boudoir. "I am convinced that Herr Roland himself will laugh at his fears to-morrow. One more question, however; is your cashier perfectly trustworthy?"

"True as gold," replied the banker; "at least I have never yet detected him in any dishonesty. I am sorry that I am going to lose him."

Sonnenberg's dark eyes were fixed keenly upon his host, who gazed before him thoughtfully.

"Lose him?" inquired the councillor. "What's the matter now? Dornberg is an impudent fellow, who carries his head very high. Has he given you notice?"

"He me or I him, it's about the same," replied his father-in-law. "I shall lose a good worker, but it could not be helped; the measure was full, it had to run over."

Sonnenberg had put on his eyeglass and risen.

"The ladies must excuse me," he said, with a slight bow. "I promised at dinner to play a game of piquet with Doctor Bruno, and suppose I must keep my word."

"What a pity!" cried Frau Heppner.

"We shall follow you," said her mother, smiling condescendingly as she gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips. "You remind me that we have neglected too long our duty as hosts."

"One moment!" interupted the banker, in a low voice, when Sonnenberg had left them. "How are matters with regard to Dora? Dornberg was furious this morning, and I did my best to feed the fire; the result was his giving me notice. That can only have increased his excitement, and if he has an interview with Dora in that state of mind I am convinced the breach will be irreparable. I suppose she has received the promissory note?"

"Last night," replied the councillor, making a ball of his cambric handkerchief and rubbing his bald head with it. "As I promised you, I persuaded Dora to let me redeem the note. It was no small sacrifice to throw fifteen hundred thalers outof the window for it, but Dora never said a word. She wanted certainty at any price;

and when, subsequently, she read her name in the note with her own eyes, she could no longer doubt."

"How contemptible to use the name of his betrothed as security with a money-lender!" cried his wife, indignantly.

"Yes, indeed, Molly; the men are not all as reliable as I am," replied the fat little man, facetiously. "I had no debts when I married you, but I have them now, and you alone are responsible for those."

"Because, through your fault, my finances are always low."

"The deuce, Molly, I did not have a present of a villa at my wedding."

"There's no knowing what the future may bring," observed Frau Roland, with an energetic wave of the hand, which was known in the family as intended to end a discussion, and was respected accordingly. "Enough now of that matter. The idea about the note was excellent. But who was it that discovered it at Goldmann's?"

"Sonnenberg," replied her husband.

"Has he dealings with that man himself?"

"I suppose you think, Paula, that that would not be very much to his credit? But you must not measure him by the usual standard. He is a society man, and the circles in which he moves often force expenses upon him which are beyond his means. And then there is nothing left him but to make a virtue of necessity."

"I do not blame him for it," his wife interrupted him. "On the contrary, I agree with you fully. If Sonnenberg has debts he will some day have the means of paying them. But your cashier's debts must be judged very differently. He has a good and fixed income, and whoever is thus fortunately situated may be expected to adapt himself to his circumstances."

"Very true," remarked Heppner, adjusting his white cravat. "That promissory note proves to me that Dornberg is a spendthrift. He can live most comfortably on his salary. Perhaps he 's a gambler or a speculator. I 'll make inquiries."

"Don't trouble yourself," said Roland. "Dornberg will be in my employ only a short time longer, and if Dora is sensible enough to discard him, why should we concern ourselves about the fellow any longer?"

"Will she really break the engagement?" asked his wife, with a doubtful glance at her son-in-law.

"No doubt of it," replied the latter, confidently. "She has promised me to give him back his word by letter to-day, and I am convinced that she will keep her promise. If she should forget to do so Frau Hennig will remind her of it, and when Dora has once taken a resolve she adheres to it. I 'll lay a wager that the rupture has taken place already."

"And if not, we must continue our exertions," said Frau Heppner, who had emptied her cup and was now looking into it thoughtfully. "That man must not intrude himself into our family."

"And, as soon as the matter is settled, we must further Sonnenberg's interests," added her mother in a low tone, which was, however, so impressive that it sounded almost like a command. "He is deeply in love with the pretty widow, but at the same time too honorable to try to displace her lover as long as he has any claims upon her."

"Sonnenberg?" asked the councillor, doubtfully. "The deuce! I hardly know."

"What objection have you to him as a brother-in-law?" continued Frau Roland more emphatically. "I hope you will admit that he is a man of honor; if that

were not the case, we should not have received him at our house."

"Of course, of course! But his circumstances—"

"Are no worse than Dornberg's," the banker interrupted him. "On the contrary, Dornberg is a poor devil now and will remain one; while Sonnenberg, one of these days, will be the heir of a rich uncle who has large estates in Silesia."

"And his title weighs something in the balance," said Frau Roland, throwing back her head. "His great-grandfather dropped it for some reason that I have forgotten—he must have been a crack-brained fellow! Herr Sonnenberg declares that it needs but a petition on his part to the king to have his patent of nobility restored to him. But now we must really make a move," she continued, with an imperative glance at her husband. "We owe some regards to our guests."

She took her daughter's arm, and the two slender figures, with heads erect, entered the adjoining drawing-room, which was separated from the boudoir by a *portière* of light-blue silk.

The little councillor and his father-in-law followed them.

"Do you approve of this plan of mamma's?" asked the former in a low tone.

"To speak frankly, I have not troubled myself much about it," replied Roland, and his voice expressed an inward anxiety which surprised his companion, as there seemed to be no reason for it. "You see," he went on, "matchmaking is woman's work. I don't want to bother my head with it. And my wife will have her way; you know her stubborn firmness. I advise you to yield. Dora can judge for herself what to do and what to leave undone."

"The only question is whether I am to try and per-

suade her," said the councillor. "She values my opinion; and I know so little about this Sonnenberg."

"If it is to be any one, Heinrich, I should prefer Sonnenberg to another, if only because that match would fulfill a wish of my wife's. And, I repeat, as far as his circumstances are concerned, they do not give any cause for doubt. Dora herself has an ample fortune, and with that the two can get along until the uncle steps out. If Dornberg had become your brother-in-law, I should have had to expect a strong competition. He intended to establish a banking business with Dora's money, and I give you my word that in that contest with him I should have done all in my power to ruin him."

They now approached a small table, at which two gentlemen were playing piquet, while others looked on.

"Is Sonnenberg not here?" asked Roland, turning to the older partner; "he left us to play a game with you, doctor."

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine," counted the doctor, in a thin, sharp voice. "Oh, sixty, sixty-one—Herr Sonnenberg?—sixty-one—was here just now; got the nose-bleed—sixty-two—probably gone home—oh, that was bad! I didn't think of this card. The rest is all yours now, I suppose?"

"Nosebleed?" said the banker. "Probably nothing serious, but unpleasant for any one who has it. *Apropos*, Heinrich, I have an autograph for your collection—a letter written by Queen Louisa, of Prussia."

"I am delighted to hear it," replied the councillor, whose moist, somewhat heavy eyes brightened at these words. "How much does it cost?"

"Nothing for you; I am glad to give you a pleasure by it. Wait, I'll get it for you. It is downstairs in my writing-desk; it may interest these gentlemen to see it."

Without waiting for any answer, the banker hastened from the room.

He slowly descended the broad staircase, decorated with rugs and luxuriant plants. He met no one, either on the stair or in the hall, but the sound of loud laughter came to him from the kitchen and the adjoining servants' quarters.

The cashroom was situated in the rear of the house, overlooking the garden, while in front were the offices and the banker's private room.

As Roland was about to open the door of the latter, his eye fell upon the janitor of the bank, who, clad in dresscoat and cravat, was acting as doorkeeper at the entertainment.

"Shall I get a light, Herr Roland?" he asked, his red face showing plainly that he had diligently availed himself of the festive occasion for his material comfort.

"Thanks, it is not necessary; I will light the gas," replied the banker, hastily. "Have you seen Herr Sonnenberg?"

"He was in the servants' room a while ago, trying to stop a nosebleed."

"I hope he succeeded!"

"Oh, yes; it was nothing serious."

"Well, and then?"

"Then he must have gone upstairs again," said the janitor, thickly, as he felt in his pocket for his white cotton gloves.

"But I did not see him upstairs."

"Well, then, I suppose he went home."

"Possibly," said the banker, dryly, opening the door and entering his private office.

The janitor had found one glove and put it on and was now searching for its mate.

"Well, deuce knows," he grumbled, while he put his hand into his vest pocket. "I 'm sure I had it. Herr Sonnenberg? Yes, indeed; I 'll bet he 's decamped, as usual, without remembering my fee. Fine gentlemen, very fine! Swelled heads and empty pocketbooks! Turn up their noses at champagne unless it 's half frozen, and —holy thunder! What was that?"

He had started in alarm. The sharp, shrill ringing of a bell resounded through the house. Servants came running from all directions. Their master had never yet rung the bell so violently.

The janitor no longer thought of his lost glove. He rushed into the office. Roland met him in feverish excitement.

"Close the front door! No one besides the guests must leave the house. A robbery has been committed here. Ask Councillor Heppner to hurry down here with one or two other gentlemen. Ah, there is Herr Sonnenberg!"

Hat in hand, Sonnenberg just then entered the office.

"What has happened?" he inquired, in his usual calm manner, while the janitor hastened from the room and Roland closed the door behind him. "I have just come from the garden, where I had gone for a few minutes to cool my head."

"You have seen nothing, heard nothing?" asked the banker, excitedly, while his eye rested on a spot of blood which he had discovered on his friend's white waistcoat.

"Nothing, my dear sir. What should I have seen or heard?"

"The thief who has robbed me!"

At that moment the councillor and the broker entered the room.

"There must be some mistake, papa," said the former. "Your janitor spoke of a robbery."

Roland, with trembling hand, pointed to his desk.

One of the drawers was half open, some scraps of paper and pieces of twine lay on the desk.

"The third key of the safe was in that drawer," he said. "I discovered what had happened as I lit the gas. The door to the cash-room was open, the safe likewise, even the inner compartment; the bank-notes are missing, the window leading to the garden is open. Do you still think that I am mistaken?"

"Do you suspect any one?" inquired the broker, while Sonnenberg and Heppner went into the cash-room.

"Don't touch anything!" cried Roland, taking no notice of the question. "Heinrich, do me the favor to go at once to the commissioner of police; a report of the facts ought to be drawn up immediately. The man lives just around the corner; if he has gone to bed he mus be waked. And you, Herr Sonnenberg, will you have the kindness to explain matters to my ladies and the guests and then return here?"

"With pleasure," replied Sonnenberg, at once following the councillor, who had already left the room.

The banker remained alone with the broker; clasping his hands behind him, he paced to and fro restlessly.

"You will remember our conversation in my wife's boudoir," he said, after a while. "It may seem strange, but I had a presentiment, as it were, that some misfortune was about to happen me. Have you ever had such a feeling?"

"Oh, yes," replied the broker, deliberately; "but it does not always come true."

"No, not always," replied Roland, "and when that is the case we forget it."

"And is the whole amount gone?"

"I fear so."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"My dear sir, I cannot answer that question. Whom should I suspect? You see yourself that it is a burglary, and a bold one at that, and the fellow who committed it would probably not have hesitated to knock me down if I had caught him in the act. He must have come in by the window."

"But how could he get into your garden?"

"Nothing easier than that. Behind the garden there are empty lots. You know they are opening a new street there, and the garden-wall is quite low."

"The scoundrel must be pursued this very night before he can dispose of the money," said the broker, eagerly. "Heavens! If you had to refund that whole large sum to Baron Busse!"

"I can't do it!" replied Roland, stopping and drawing a deep breath. "But I hope matters will not go so far; the police must find the fellow."

Just then Herr Sonnenberg returned and reported that the guests were leaving, and expressed the warmest sympathy. The ladies felt very anxious, but madam had expressed the confident hope that the matter would turn out better than had been feared at the first moment.

They were still discussing the subject when the councillor arrived with the commissioner of police, and the investigation was begun.

The money was gone; only a few rolls of silver and some gold pieces were still in the basket in which the hard cash was kept.

The indications were that the thief had broken open the drawer of the writing-desk, taken out the key and opened the safe with it, and when Roland directed

attention to the open window the officer went into the garden with a lantern to look for further traces.

When he returned he produced the safe-key, which he had found in the garden.

"I presume the thief intended to put us on a wrong track," he said. "I have given up the idea of a burglary. I found no footprints either under the window or anywhere in the garden; and, besides, there is no indication whatever that this window has been forced open. Are you sure that it was closed?"

"My janitor can answer that question," replied the banker. "It is his business to see that the windows are opened and closed."

He was about to call the man, but the officer detained him.

"Wait awhile, please. Has this janitor been in your employ long?"

"Over ten years, and I can only speak well of him."

"Is there any one among the employees of the bank or your house-servants upon whom suspicion might fall?"

"No," replied Roland, after some reflection, restlessly pulling his thin red whiskers. "Don't you agree with me, Heinrich? You know all these people as well as I do. There is no such scoundrel among them."

"You can't say that with certainty," replied the councillor, shrugging his shoulders. "One can never know a person thoroughly."

"Well, I will tell you the opinion I have formed so far," said the officer. "The thief must have been aware of the large amount which the safe contained. He had, therefore, so to speak, no difficulties to overcome. The front door was probably open, on account of the wedding. Such of the servants as were not employed in the kitchen were waiting on the guests upstairs. Hence,

it was easy for any one to enter the house, unperceived. And when he had once succeeded in that, he could commit the robbery at his leisure. He opened the window and threw the key into the garden, in order to divert suspicion from himself. And he might have been successful in that if he had gone to work about it more skillfully. And now I want to ask you who, besides yourself, was aware that the key was kept in this drawer?"

"Only my bookkeeper and my cashier," replied Roland, who was again pacing to and fro.

"No one else?"

"No one."

"And those two gentlemen—"

"I have the fullest confidence in them," said Roland, quickly. "Nothing could make me believe that either of them had committed this crime."

The officer shook his head.

"Do not reject that possibility so hastily and decidedly," he replied. "I repeat that only a man who is perfectly familiar with everything here can have done the deed. Do you remember the denominations of the bills?"

"Baron Busse's money consisted of three packages, each containing one hundred five-thaler bills. Besides that I miss about forty thousand thalers of my own, mostly in one-hundred-thaler bills."

"That was, indeed, an unusually large balance."

"It would not have been so large if I had had time before the wedding to send Baron Busse's money to the bank. Unfortunately, I was not prepared to receive it to-day. And my own balance in hand was so large because I am obliged to pay some acceptances to the amount of forty thousand thalers to-morrow."

"However large or small the balance in hand may

have been, one ought to be able to trust the security of a safe like that," said the councillor, emphatically. "The deuce! If you can't even be sure of that—"

"The key should have been taken better care of," interrupted the officer, shrugging his shoulders, as he commenced drawing up a report. "I cannot help saying that you were to blame in that respect, Herr Roland, particularly as you were aware that the safe could be opened by any one who had the key."

"No one knew that but those whom I could trust fully."

"You seem to have been mistaken on that point," remarked Sonnenberg, who, in the meantime, had lit a cigar and now was thoughtfully following the smoke with his eyes. "I agree with this gentleman. The thief must even have known where to look for the key."

"But how should he have got into the cash-room, the door of which was also locked, noiselessly and unobserved?" asked Roland.

"Was it still locked when you came in?" asked the officer.

"I entered through the other room."

The officer rose and went to the door which led from the cash-room into the passage; it was unlocked.

"What do you say now?" he asked dryly. "Your janitor seems not to have fulfilled the duties of his profession as faithfully as you supposed. If you will call him now, I will ask him some questions on the subject."

The janitor was still looking for the lost glove; his face was even redder than before.

"Do you remember distinctly having fastened that window and locked that door to-day?" asked the officer, after looking at the man long and searchingly.

"Distinctly, sir; just as I always do!" the janitor

replied. "The bank closed at noon to-day, and then I locked all the doors and fastened the windows and took the keys upstairs to my master."

"Is there but one key to this door?"

"There are two; Herr Dornberg has the other."

"Who is he?"

"Our cashier. I think he was here this evening."

All present drew nearer at these words.

"At what time this evening?" asked the banker excitedly.

"Allow me to interrogate him," said the officer. "So Herr Dornberg had a key to the cash-room? Probably so that he could go and come as he pleased?"

"Exactly," the banker hastily interrupted him. "It had happened repeatedly that the janitor was not at hand in the morning or afternoon, when the cashier came in. Then he would have to send to me for the key, and that was too inconvenient. So we gave him a key. I was not aware, until now, of his having been here to-night, and I cannot imagine what occasion he should have had for coming."

"You saw him, then?" continued the officer, again turning to the janitor, who was rubbing his wrinkled forehead, as if to freshen his memory.

"Well, I can't say so with certainty; but it was his gray felt hat and his brown overcoat. You know I just saw him as he was going out of the front door; and I was about to speak to him, only I thought: 'What should be the matter? He has as good a right to be here as I have.'"

"When did you see him?"

"It might have been an hour ago. I was coming from the kitchen, to get water from the court."

"And you did not see him before that? Nor did you hear any suspicious noise?"

"Nothing whatever, sir, though my ears are very good. But all the locks in the house are well oiled; I see to that; and a door might easily be unlocked without any one hearing it."

The janitor had nothing more to tell. But he had said enough to attach suspicion to Gustav Dornberg, and the councillor demanded the immediate arrest of the cashier.

The official shook his head in denial.

"You will have to wait until to-morrow," he said, after requesting the two other gentlemen to sign as eye-witnesses of the facts of the case. "It is the business of the examining magistrate to issue the warrant, and you must admit, besides, that there are as yet no convincing proofs of Herr Dornberg's guilt."

"No," replied Roland, passing his handkerchief over his damp forehead; "I cannot think him capable of this crime. He may have been here—possibly he came to get something from his desk."

"So late at night?" asked his son-in-law, testily. "I should think the most unprejudiced person must think it strange that he sneaked into the house at such an hour."

"Well, yes, that is suspicious; but it doesn't prove anything."

"And then, the cashier had a safe-key of his own," the broker ventured to remark, with an important air. "Therefore there was no need of his breaking open the writing-desk."

"You must excuse me if I take a different view," replied Sonnenberg. "If he had not broken open the writing-desk suspicion would have fallen on him at once, for there are no traces of the safe having been forced open."

"Very true," observed the councillor, "and what-

ever others may think of the honesty of this man, I maintain that he ought to be arrested forthwith. My goodness! This is not a question of a few thalers, but of a sum the loss of which may affect the security of this firm. I can't understand how you can take it so coolly, papa."

"Coolly?" replied Roland, stopping in his work, in a bitter tone. "What would I gain by ranting and raving? It would be different if Dornberg's guilt were proved, and in that case this gentleman would surely order an arrest at once; but now, as he declares that he does not feel authorized to do so, we cannot force him to it."

"Have patience until to-morrow," said the official. "The cashier does not know that the janitor saw and recognized him; if he is guilty he will think that he has acted very guardedly, and will make his appearance again to-morrow so that no suspicion can fall upon him. When does he generally get here?"

"Shortly before nine," replied Roland. "The bank opens at nine."

"Well, I will notify Judge Hartmann before that hour and come here with him; until then I must request these gentlemen to keep the matter secret, so that the cashier may not be put on his guard. Impress this upon your janitor as well. What is his name?"

"Clement Wolf."

"You have no other man-servant in the house?"

"No Only two girls; but for to-day I have engaged several attendants who are strangers to me."

"Take me to the servants' room and assemble the whole crowd, so that I can have a look at them," the officer continued, taking leave of the other gentlemen with a slight bow. It might be possible that some experienced sharper had entered the house in that way."

"But he would not be likely to know where to look for the safe-key," objected the councillor.

The official made no reply to this remark; he followed the banker into the servants' room, where all the attendants were assembled, awaiting the result of the investigation.

His eye rested searchingly upon each face; then he asked whether any one among them had seen any suspicious person in the house, or heard any unusual noise.

All answered in the negative; the official gave a satisfied nod and left the room.

"I know all those people," he said; "there is not one of them but has a good record."

"Then suspicion rests upon my cashier alone?"

"Yes, for the present. Do you care so very much about that?"

"Of course, it is not pleasant for me. They are very much inclined on 'Change to blame the head of a firm if its cashier decamps. They all say he should have been more cautious, kept a sharper lookout, and then the thing would not have happened."

"Well, I have no doubt that the same reproach will fall upon you. You should have been more careful of the third key."

"And if I had been, would that have prevented the theft, provided my cashier committed it? Of course, I had to intrust one key to him. But no, you will convince yourself that he is not the thief," continued Roland, as he opened the front door for the officer. "I still assert that you are on a wrong track."

"That the examining magistrate will determine tomorrow," was the reply. "For the moment nothing farther can he done in the matter."

He bowed briefly after these words and left the house, while the banker returned to his office.

CHAPTER III.

PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE.

On the following morning the councillor was up betimes. Much earlier than was usually the case, he was sitting with his wife at the breakfast-table.

"You 'll see that the fellow is out of reach by this time," he said grimly, as he stirred his coffee. "The deuce! I can't understand why they didn't arrest him at once. As soon as Clement said that he had seen Dornberg in the house I felt convinced that he was the thief. Sonnenberg agreed with me, but papa thought he must defend him. It is incomprehensible."

"Mamma couldn't understand it either," said his wife, laying down the paper in which she had been studying the advertisements. "Such a fellow should be summarily dealt with. I should think he had given us trouble enough already. And it would be a good lesson for Dora, besides, if this fortune-hunter were to be locked up. She would be obliged to break her engagement in that case."

"She probably did so last night."

"I shall not believe that until Dora herself tells me so."

"If not, Dornberg would not have committed the theft," said her husband, confidently; and his wife showed, by a gracious inclination of her head, that she acknowledged the truth of this assertion. "He meant to revenge himself on us all by it. The deuce! What if he should succeed in getting away with the money? The firm of Roland would have to stop payment. It would be ruined."

"I must request you to speak of my father more respectfully," she replied, tossing her head. "Papa's house stands so firmly that it may totter, but will never break down."

"But consider, almost two hundred thousand thalers!"

"A great loss, certainly; but papa will get over it!"

"H-m, if you think so!"

"Didn't he give that villa to Léonie and pay cash down for it?"

"Unfortunately; it was a great wrong toward us."

"We shall not suffer by it—don't be so greedy, Heinrich! I only wished to remind you that a man who can make presents like that must be very wealthy."

"That does not always follow," said the councillor, shaking his head, while his broad face grew quite serious. "Frankly, Molly, I think your parents have been living quite extravagantly of late years, and though the profits have been great—"

"And if they have spent much, what business is it of yours?" his wife interrupted him, with asperity; and the glance of displeasure which fell upon him from her cold, steel-gray eyes abashed him so much, that he hung his head and gazed silently into his cup, which bore, in gilt letters, the inscription, "To my dear husband." "I think papa knows perfectly well how far he may go in his expenses, and of his income he can probably judge for himself equally well. But I know

what vexes you, Heinrich; if papa had given us a villa, too—"

"Thank you, I 'd rather have the money!" grumbled he. "Such a villa involves too many expenses, and I have cares enough without that. I expect Menzel will feel very proud when he gets home from his wedding-trip. If the villa does not ruin him I'm much mistaken. They 've bought two big dogs already, and he 's been talking about getting a saddle-horse; and when once they have that, a carriage will soon follow."

"If he can afford such luxuries, why should he not have them?" replied his wife, shrugging her shoulders. "I should like to have them, too, but those who invest all their money must be satisfied with the few thalers of interest which it brings."

"I had rather content myself with a limited, sure income, than expose my property to the risks of a game of chance," he replied, curtly.

Then, passing his hand over his bald head, he continued, in a depressed tone:

"I wish I hadn't drunk that heavy Rüdesheim last night. The excitement over the robbery made us all take more than necessary, too."

"You never can keep within bounds, you know."

"You had better say that to papa, who saw double when we separated. He must be in a charming mood this morning. I wonder what they will discover to-day. I 'm sure they repent of not having had Dornberg arrested at once."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the maid, who handed the councillor a note.

"From Madame Ernestine," he said, after hastily opening it. "Only a few lines. Dora gave Master

Lackland his walking-ticket last evening. The breach is irreparable. Excellent! So that matter is settled."

"Now we must prepare the way for Sonnenberg," replied his wife.

"But why just he? I don't think much of him."

"Because you have not taken the trouble to get acquainted with him. Mamma is in favor of him. I should think that ought to suffice for you, and the rich landholder, Herr von Sonnenberg—"

"We haven't got as far as that yet!"

"But we shall get as far," she continued in the sharp tone which admitted of no contradiction. "Papa has made inquiries about him and found everything most satisfactory."

"Well, I don't care," he muttered, as he went into the next room. "Dora will have to decide for herself about that."

He came out again in a few moments, with his hat and ovcreoat on, and stepped before the mirror to cast a glance at his attire, about the faultlessness of which he was very particular.

"I shall call on Dora when the investigation is over, he said. "I know with certainty now how matters stand. I expressed my opinion last night, but your father would not believe in Dornberg's guilt. Well, his eyes will be opened now!"

With this he left the room, and as he walked to his father-in-law's house, with head erect, here and there returning a bow with a friendly, condescending air, no one would have guessed the serious anxiety which filled his mind.

The blame which he tacitly attached to his wife's parents was by no means unfounded, and the thoughts to which it gave rise were, in his opinion, likewise fully justified.

The extravagant style in which the banker had lived of late must have swallowed up not only his business profits but even most of his property. The councillor could calculate as well as any one, he thought, and he feared that his father-in-law was on the brink of a catastrophe which might result in a failure.

He was well aware of the aim of the extravagance in question; Frau Roland had made no secret of it in the family circle, and that aim had been accomplished.

In view of this, it might have been possible to retrench and make up for the loss; but now this robbery threatened to interfere disastrously with all such efforts, as the capital of the firm would hardly do more than replace the stolen sum. However, it was not yet certain that the latter would not be recovered. If the thief was once under lock and key the money, too, would be forthcoming.

The councillor had just calmed his anxiety with this confident hope as he entered the house of his father-in-law.

The commissioner of police and the examining magistrate were already in the private office; the clerk was taking down the minutes.

After having exchanged greetings with the gentlemen present, Heppner cast a glance into the cashroom. Dornberg had not yet arived.

"You 'll see that he won't come," he said, turning to his father-in-law, who was pacing up and down the room. "Dora dismissed him last night; his anger at that has probably led him to leave town, and so he supplied himself with funds for travelling."

"Are you quite sure that this rupture has taken place?" asked the examining judge of Heppner. "I had already been informed that Herr Dornberg was engaged to your sister."

"But is so no longer, sir," the councillor interrupted him. "I received the news of the breach a short time ago; so there is no doubt of that fact."

"And what was the cause of it?"

In reply, the councillor related to him the circumstances which had led to the rupture, and the proof which they had furnished that Dornberg had sought his sister's hand merely for her money, and that he was, withal, a spendthrift."

"Is he really that?" asked the judge of Herr Roland.

"I cannot tell," replied the latter, starting from his gloomy reverie as from a bad dream. "I know nothing of his private life. I was always well satisfied with him, and have never considered him otherwise than a trustworthy, honorable man. Farther than that I know nothing."

"One can be greatly mistaken in people sometimes," said the councillor, while his inquisitive glance turned with impatient expectation to the janitor, who was just entering the room. "Well, Clement, what have you to tell us?"

"Herr Dornberg's landlady is outside."

"Bring her in!" cried the banker, excitedly.

"The old story!" grumbled his son-in-law, laying his little fat hand upon the judge's arm. "He sends word that he is ill, so as to gain time for flight."

The landlady entered the room. She was an old, bent woman in plain dress, the widow of an artisan, in whose house Dornberg had lodged for several years.

She handed the banker a letter and a small, sealed package. In the latter were the keys to the safe and to Dornberg's desk.

The letter contained nothing but the communication that circumstances had occurred which rendered it impossible for the writer to fill his position as cashier in

Herr Roland's bank any longer; that, consequently, he had resolved to leave town that same evening, and hoped that, at some future time, his chief would recognize how dishonorably he and his relatives had acted toward him.

"Well, if that 's not enough to open your eyes, you must want to be blind!" cried the councillor. "What did I tell you last night? If my advice had been followed, you might have caught him at the station. Now he is out of reach!"

"He will not go far," replied the judge. "We shall telegraph at once in all directions. When did Herr Dornberg give you this letter, Frau— What is your name, if you please?"

"Widow Caroline Pauer, sir."

"Very well, Frau Pauer; when did you receive this letter?"

"I found the letter and the package this morning in Herr Dornberg's room. I had waited a long time for him to ring for breakfast, and at last I knocked at his door. It wasn't locked, so I went into his sitting-room, and wondered that I did not hear any sound in his bedroom. And then I found the letter and the package on the table and a sheet of paper beside them, on which Dornberg had written to ask me to bring these things here; that he had left town and would not return. There was a quarter's rent lying on the table, too. Herr Dornberg always paid promptly, and I am sorry to lose so good a lodger."

"His clothes are all gone, of course?" asked the councillor, who was vigorously mopping his bald head with his handkerchief.

"No, sir. As far as I could find out, he has only taken one suit and a change of linen in his small valise."

"That 's natural, too!" said Herr Heppner, nodding.

"On such a journey a man would, of course, take as little luggage as possible. Oh, the scoundrel! He isn't worth the rope with which he ought to be hung."

"When was the letter written?" continued the judge, turning to the widow again. "Can you tell me anything certain about that? Was Herr Dornberg at home last night?"

"When I went to bed at ten o'clock," she replied, "he had not come in yet. He never got home before ten. Toward eleven I heard him coming; he had a latch-key and did not need to ring. Fifteen minutes later he went away again; I heard him come downstairs with heavy steps and shut the front door immediately after."

"And when does the night-train leave?" the judge asked the commissioner of police.

"At one o'clock, sharp, sir; it is a slow train till morning, and then an express."

"It goes to Belgium, does it not?"

"Excuse me, sir; it reaches a junction toward morning, and from there several express-trains go in various directions," said the councillor. "You had better telegraph to all the sea-ports; but it is quite possible, you know, that he is still in hiding here to wait until the first search is over."

The judge dictated to his clerk the warrant and the personal description of the fugitive, which he signed, and with which the police officer departed, in order to have the pursuit commenced at once.

Then he asked Frau Pauer to accompany him to Dornberg's lodgings, in order to have them searched.

"I suppose the matter will have to be made public now?" asked Roland, hoarsely, as he restlessly turned over the papers which lay on the writing-desk.

"And why should it be kept secret," replied the

magistrate. "Even if that could be done there would be no advantage in it."

"I suppose you are right, but such publicity is very unpleasant to me. People will pay more attention to me and my business than I care about."

"It can't be avoided, papa," said the councillor. "And, moreover, you owe it to Baron Busse to have the thief pursued energetically, and that can't be done in secret. Would it not be well to offer a reward for his capture and the return of the money?"

"Certainly," replied Roland. "Will you kindly make a note of that, sir? I offer a reward of five thousand thalers for the return of the stolen money."

The judge nodded in acquiescence and took his leave, accompanied by his clerk and Frau Pauer. Roland leaned back in his chair and passed his handkerchief over his damp forehead.

"What now?" he asked, with a helpless look at his son-in-law. "The notes which are due to-day will be presented within an hour, and it is not in my power to pay them."

"Forty thousand thalers?" said the councillor. "Can't you get help anywhere? I should think the holders of the notes would be willing to wait till to-morrow before having them protested."

"I can't pay to-morrow either, unless the thief should be arrested to-day and the money found in his possession."

"Which is very doubtful."

"So you think I shall not recover the money?"

"Ah, you are by yourselves? So much the better!" cried Frau Roland, who entered the office at this moment, elegantly dressed for the day. "Clement told me that Dornberg decamped last night. Is it true?"

Her gray eyes rested expectantly on the councillor,

who answered in the affirmative, and secretly admired the imperturbable composure displayed by his mother-in-law.

"And the money?" she continued quickly. "Has it been found?"

"I fear it will never be found," replied the councillor. "The fellow has too much of a start. And besides that, we must not forget that this theft is, in the main, an act of the lowest revenge. Dora has dismissed him, and he is shrewd enough to know that he has us to thank for that. So he thinks he can repay us by ruining papa. I am convinced that he would rather destroy the stolen bank-notes than have them returned to us."

"That would be dreadful," said Roland, leaning his heavy head on his hand. "If I lose the whole amount I am bankrupt. My whole property will not suffice even to repay Baron Busse's loss. This, of course, is between ourselves. It is but right that you should know the whole truth. I have had several losses lately which, under ordinary circumstances, I should have surmounted without difficulty, but which now only serve to increase the deficit."

"Then we must console ourselves with the consciousness that our failure will at least not be a dishonorable one," remarked his wife, who even now retained her equanimity and composure. "It is a misfortune for which no one can blame you, and which, after all, might happen to any one."

"Nevertheless, we must try to avert it," said the councillor, drawing a deep breath. "If the question is only the payment of the acceptances that are due to-day, I may be able to help you. I can pledge my bonds at the bank. Of course, you would have to be responsible for the costs, the interest and their future redemption."

Roland shook his head.

"I am very grateful for your offer, but I cannot accept it," said he, while his wife slowly paced to and fro, with head erect. "I do not wish to reduce you to beggary too. I could not repay you, Heinrich. The consequences of this heavy blow must fall upon me alone; I cannot let my children suffer by it too. I shall have to allow the notes to be protested, and then stop payment for a while. If I recover the stolen money within a few days I shall be able to meet all liabilities; if not, my creditors will have to divide what is left among themselves."

"And we will go and live at the villa with Léonie," added Frau Roland; "we stipulated for that when we gave it to her. Four rooms are to be at our disposal; they were furnished with a view to that. Naturally, we shall have to retrench, but two old people like us don't need much; of course, it is hard to be let down in this way, yet what can we do?"

"The deuce! We haven't got so far yet, nor shall we, I hope," said the councillor briskly, taking out his gloves. "Even if I adhere to my suspicions, it does not follow that I may not be mistaken, and then it is quite possible that the thief and the money may be found to-day."

"Heaven grant it!" sighed the banker. "But what if, in spite of all, we were on a wrong track?"

"Do you still want to defend that man?" asked his wife, indignantly. "I should think the matter was beyond doubt now! Of course, he will deny his guilt, and, perhaps, the money will not be found on him; but would that be a proof of his innocence? Not to my mind nor, as I hope and believe, to that of the judge."

"I fully agree with you," said the councillor, taking his hat. "We made a mistake in not ousting the fellow

sooner. It should have been done when he had the impudence to ask for my sister's hand. We ought to have paid no regard to Dora's feelings, but shown her that we did not consider the man worthy of being received into our family-circle."

"That is just what I said at the time, but no one listened to me," exclaimed Frau Roland, with a reproachful glance at her husband, who sat in his easy-chair, rolled up like a hedgehog, gazing fixedly before him. "Regret comes too late now."

"Then I can't help you, papa?" asked the councillor.

"No, my son!" replied Roland, passing his hand hastily over his haggard face. "I must bear it alone. I suppose it will be all over town to-day. I don't care to go out. If anybody asks you about it, take my part."

"As if that were necessary!" observed his wife, turning another hard, cold glance upon him. "Who is to blame you? You can't be made responsible for your cashier's rascality; it is bad enough that the law forces you to make good Baron Busse's loss."

"I 'll send an item to the paper, in which the matter is placed in the true light and Dornberg exposed in all his meanness," said the councillor, as he left the office in order to call upon his sister.

He was admitted by the surly old servant without a word, and was received in the drawing-room by Ernestine, who, when she saw him, laid her finger upon her narrow, bloodless lips.

"Silence!" she whispered, offering him a chair. "Dora does not know that I have written. She is extremely irritable."

Before the councillor could reply, Dora entered through the *portière*. She was pale but calm. Only a slight trembling of the lips betrayed that the storm in her breast was not yet allayed.

In feigned alarm her brother went to meet her.

"How pale you are!" he said, in a tone of cordial sympathy. "Have you heard the news?"

"Which?" she replied, fixing her eyes upon him.

"That Dornberg has decamped."

Dora's hand went to her heart. An inexpressibly bitter expression passed over her beautiful face.

"Perhaps it was the best thing he could do," she said, in a trembling voice. "He could no longer have wished to look any of you in the face. He knew his enemies. Well, you have succeeded in parting us; but it was not a good deed. It would have been better if I had never heard of the promissory note—"

"Well, well, Dora, if your eyes are not opened yet, there 's no use in trying any further," her brother interrupted her, as they seated themselves. "I can answer to you and to my conscience for having taken this trouble for you, for I tell myself that I have thus preserved you from something worse. You seem to have heard nothing of what has happened, and I am sorry that it cannot be concealed from you; but, at any rate, it is better that you should hear it from me than from others."

"What is it?" asked Dora, with asperity. "The breach between us can hardly be widened, and you surely will not care to bridge it over."

"The deuce! You say all that to me in a tone that is actually insulting!" he replied, testily, while he looked askance at the grave, cold face of Ernestine, who sat by the window at her embroidery and appeared not to be paying any attention to the conversation. "I should think you owed me some thanks for unmasking that fortune-hunter for you betimes. For he was a fortune-hunter, and one of the worst kinds, at that. This is proved by the fact that he robbed my

father-in-law's safe after the hopes he had set on your property had vanished. There is a warrant out for him now, and the police will not fail to find him; then he'll be sure to be sent to state's prison for some years."

Dora's face had grown still paler, her eyes stared fixedly at her brother, a low, hoarse cry escaped her lips.

"Gustav a criminal?" she said, with a quick, wild glance at Ernestine, who had risen. "That is impossible!"

"It has been proved," replied the councillor, shrugging his shoulders. "Two hundred thousand thalers have been taken from Roland's iron safe, and Dornberg had the key to the safe. He was seen last evening at about half-past ten, by the janitor, sneaking out of the house, and at midnight he left town by the night train. My father-in-law discovered the robbery last night. He found the safe open; but although suspicion pointed to Dornberg even then, the police would not arrest him. It was only this morning that Judge Hartmann issued a warrant, and to-morrow you'll see his personal description in all the papers."

Dora had risen from her seat and stood before her brother, drawn up to her full height. Burning indignation flashed from her dark eyes, and around her firmly set lips there hovered a sharply defined expression of courageous determination.

"And I tell you once more it is impossible that Gustav should have committed this crime," she said, in a steady voice. "You all have sinned deeply against him, but you will not succeed in branding him a criminal. He never could fall as low as that."

"Pshaw! What should we care what became of him if he had not robbed the safe?" answered he, angrily. "Do you think it would be a matter of indifference to

me if my father-in-law should be forced by this robbery to declare himself insolvent? And I, too, repeat that all the proofs point to Dornberg as the thief. It is utterly improbable that another should have done the deed. You may say against it whatever you like. The facts are established and can no longer be disputed."

"You may thank heaven for having protected you from a marriage with that man," said Ernestine, in her cold, measured manner. "It would have been even more unhappy than your first one."

"And you also have turned against him?" asked Dora, in a tone of sorrowful reproach. "To be sure, you never were his friend—"

"Excuse me for interrupting you. You must remember that I always was his friend until that promissory note proved to me that he did not deserve your love. And why should I doubt his guilt now when Herr Heppner has declared that it has been proved. The man who could deceive you so shamefully was certainly capable of committing a crime like this."

"No, Ernestine, and though you may all condemn him, I know him better!" continued Dora. "He may have been a spendthrift, but he is not capable of a dishonorable action!"

"And what do you call it when he used your name as security for a loan from a money-lender?" asked her brother, with a sneer. "Was not that dishonorable? I should not think that a man could trample his honor under foot much more than that. And in my opinion this robbery was prompted by nothing but the desire to revenge himself on us for the intrigues of which he accused us. The deuce! His rupture with you was no reason for him to take so sudden a flight! If he wanted to leave, he ought to have settled his accounts with Roland first; nobody would sneak out of such a

position like a cat from a pigeon-loft if he had even a tolerably clean conscience. And what business had he at the bank last evening after ten o'clock? He had declined the invitation to the wedding, and yet it has been proved that he entered the house secretly; he does not know himself that anybody saw him and recognized him."

"He was here between eight and nine," said Ernestine, casting a searching glance askance at Dora, who had covered her eyes with her hand; "he smelt of liquor."

"Why need you mention that," Dora interrupted her, in a displeased tone. "Have you not thrown enough stones at him yet? Do as you like, I shall adhere to my opinion, and no one can convince me that I am mistaken."

"We will have to wait, then, until the court condemns him," replied the councillor, who was, as usual, adjusting his white cravat, and made no secret of his increasing vexation. "I think the verdict will convince you. But, Dora, let me warn you earnestly against any personal interference in this disagreeable matter. You owe it to your connection and your own reputation to abstain from anything of the kind. It will be more than enough to have the promissory note in everybody's mouth."

The bitter expression about Dora's lips became more prominent. Her fixed, lusterless gaze rested upon her brother, who was putting on his gloves.

"Make your mind easy," she said, in a dejected tone. "Between him and me there is a barrier which nothing can remove. I can never forgive him for deceiving me, and though I am by no means indifferent to his fate, yet—"

"You must be indifferent to it," he interrupted her,

rising hastily. "How can you keep up your interest in a man whom you yourself have unmasked as a common swindler? I, in your place, would insert a declaration in the papers that the engagement had been broken off on my part, so that everybody may learn how matters stand."

"Why should that be necessary? Would it be agreeable to you if I were forced to answer all the inquisitive questions about my motives for such a declaration? I should certainly be asked who had spied out the debt at Goldmann's, and then I should have to mention your name, and you cannot say that your having done so is very much to your credit."

"Other people will judge differently of that, particularly as subsequent facts have proved what an invaluable service I did you by it," replied he, offering her his hand, of which she took no notice. "Don't take the matter so much to heart, Dora. You should rejoice that you are rid of that fellow. Your former love ought to change to contempt now. I 'll call again in the course of the day to bring you any farther news there may be. Good-by!"

Dora had turned her back to him some time before; she stood by the window, looking out. She did not notice how closely Ernestine was watching her.

No, she could not have been so mistaken in the man; she could not conceive the thought that he was capable of a such a crime. She had loved him; she loved him still, even though she could not forgive that which she called a betrayal of her love. And possibly he was not so guilty as he seemed in that case—but no, he had refused all explanation with regard to it, had merely referred to his word of honor and, by his silence, had only confirmed the evil suspicion which the wording of the promissory note cast upon him.

Now they were parted forever, she could no longer do anything for him; however his fate might shape itself, she would have to leave him to it.

All this she said to her companion, and every word which she spoke expressed anguish. and sorrow and the bitter complaints of injured love, which is vainly longing for the return of the sunshine which once made it so happy.

Ernestine did not defend Gustav; she looked upon the deed as proved, but tried to excuse it by the probability of its having been committed in a fit of mental aberration.

In this she rested upon the judgment of the councillor, who had also declared that Dornberg had committed this crime in order to revenge himself on Dora's connections; but this opinion, too, Dora would not agree to.

She could not think him capable either of so mean a revenge, and the longer she considered the matter the more firmly she became convinced that the proofs which had been adduced in favor of his guilt could be only apparent ones. She had just explained this to her companion in a tone of convincing certainty, when Herr Sonnenberg was announced.

"I can see no one to-day," said Dora. "It is quite impossible."

"Then permit me to receive the gentleman," replied Ernestine; "a formal refusal might offend him, and we cannot tell what the object of his call may be."

"Probably mere curiosity."

"I hardly think so; Herr Sonnenberg is too much of a gentleman to be actuated by so paltry a motive."

"Well, as you please," said Dora. "You'll find me in the boudoir when he is gone."

Ernestine waited till her mistress had left the room;

then she went into the adjourning apartment where she was met by Sonnenberg.

"I am very sorry," she said, raising her voice, "but Frau Winkler is not at all well; you will have to excuse her for to-day."

"Then I must ask you to assure her of my sincere sympathy," he replied, in the same loud tone, while his searching glance turned toward the door. "I merely wished to express my regrets to her."

"So you know what has happened?"

"I was present last night when the robbery was discovered."

Ernestine's eyes flashed and rested for a few seconds inquiringly upon his pale face, across which there flitted a smile half of mockery, half of triumph.

"Will you take a seat?" she asked.

He did so, placing his chair close beside hers and giving one more keen look at the door.

"Can we talk without fear of being disturbed?" he inquired, in a low voice.

"Dora has gone to her boudoir; and even if the servant should try to listen, she would hear nothing."

"Dora has learned what has happened?"

"Herr Heppner was here just now."

"How did she take it?"

"As was to be expected," replied Ernestine. "She, of course, thought it her duty to defend Dornberg; but, tell me first, is his guilt proved?"

"So it seems."

"You know that he has decamped?"

"Yes; and that is just what will ruin him."

"Then you don't believe him guilty?"

"It matters little what I believe or do not believe," he replied, evasively, passing his hand, on which glittered a diamond of the first water, over his long black

beard. "The proofs are against him. That is sufficient. I don't trouble myself about anything further."

Ernestine's blue-gray eyes rested keenly upon his pale face. It seemed as if, with their penetrating glance, they were trying to fathom Sonnenberg's most secret thoughts.

"Do you think he will be convicted?"

"Yes; but it would be better if he should succeed in escaping."

"Why?"

"H-m—Dora might think herself bound—"

"To stand up for him? No fear of that. All is over between those two. The words that were spoken last evening cannot be recalled; and, even though Dora defends him now, she will change her mind as soon as he is arrested and his guilt proved."

"And then?" he asked, with a keen look.

"Well, I think that then the way will be smoothed for you, Theo," she replied, and her whisper sounded like the hissing of a serpent. "But we must beware of being overhasty; that might spoil all. Is the councillor on your side?"

"His wife and the Rolands are; I am not so sure about him."

"It might be better for you if he were not," she said, reflectively. "Dora is displeased with him, and it cannot be denied that she has good reason for it. For the present she will mistrust his friends and those of his parents-in-law, and therefore it seems to me advisable that you should not be recommended to her by them. On the contrary, you ought to defend Dornberg against the accusations of the family, confirm Dora in the belief of his innocence and place your services at her disposal."

"Would not that be dangerous?"

"How so?"

"Well; if Dornberg should be acquitted in consequence—"

"Did you not say that the proofs against him are convincing?"

"Certainly; no efforts of mine—"

"You do not understand me. I do not expect you to take serious steps toward preventing his conviction; that would be folly. It will be enough if you defend him merely by words and let the matter take its course in every other respect. Dora will give you great credit for that, and acquit you of any selfish motive; and when Dornberg is once convicted you will stand high in her favor."

Sonnenberg put his gold glasses on his nose and looked reflectively around the elegantly furnished room.

"Your plan may be very good, Ernestine," he said; "but in that way it would take me a long time to reach my aim."

"If the proofs are so strong, they will make short work with him," she replied; "and consequently the verdict will soon follow. You will be forced to have patience at any rate; Dora does not forget so quickly. And I should not advise any man to speak to her of love before Dornberg's conviction; he might get an answer which would crush his hopes forever. If I am to help you, you must follow my advice; no one could give you better. You cannot hope to take the fortress by storm in this case."

"Well, but in the meantime—"

"In the meantime you will quietly play your part. The means for doing so shall not be wanting."

"What do you know about the means I need for it?"

he said, with a sneer. "My debts are accumulating; they will get the better of me soon!"

"Will Goldmann not loan you any more money?"

"He is beginning to raise difficulties, and his terms grow harder and harder."

"However hard they may be, you will be able to meet them most satisfactorily in the future. I have no doubt of a favorable result if you implicitly follow my instructions. Will you do so?"

"Am I not obliged to?" he answered, moodily.

"It is well for you that you recognize the necessity. Now listen: I shall tell Dora that you came here to offer her your services, that, as one of Roland's guests at the wedding, you were among those who first discovered the robbery, and that, although all the proofs apparently pointed to Dornberg's guilt, you could not believe that he had committed the deed, that you sympathize deeply with Dora's sorrow, and have thus been moved to take her lover's part. Of course you have not heard of the breaking of the engagement, and I have not informed you of it. You have promised to make farther inquiries to-day, and will call again to-morrow. To-morrow she will receive you, and that will be the beginning of an intimacy."

"That would be a good deal gained, indeed," he said, while his dark eyes flashed passionately.

"Only follow my advice closely," she went on, "and carefully avoid everything which might place you in a selfish light. Of course our secret must be preserved as closely as possible. Dora must not have the slightest suspicion that there is any connection between us. Keep a careful watch over every word, every look of yours. You have no idea how closely she observes."

"You need not fear. I shall not betray our secret."

"If you did all would be at an end. We should just

have to pack up and begin anew in some other place far from here," she said in a warning tone.

"I think you know me, and will not doubt that I shall strictly carry out the part which I have once undertaken," he replied. "But some day she will have to learn the truth."

"Then, after your marriage, there will no longer be any danger," she interrupted him. "And until then we shall have plenty of time to plan how the disclosure shall be made. And now it is time for you to leave; your staying longer might excite suspicion. So you 'll call again to-morrow," she continued, rising and extending her hand to him. "Try to think of some plausible reason which you can advance for Dornberg's innocence."

Theodor Sonnenberg rose and took his hat, and Ernestine's face, usually so cold and severe, expressed sincere admiration as she looked at him.

"Very well," he said, in a low tone, "I will trust myself to your guidance, however repugnant it may be to me to take the part of my detested rival."

"It is the best way; I might almost say the only one by which you can reach your aim."

"Well, the end justifies the means! *Au revoir*, then; good-by!"

Ernestine nodded assent and looked after him triumphantly until the door closed behind him; then she, too, left the room, to join her mistress in the boudoir and begin the execution of the plan agreed upon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OTHER SIDE.

Although the news of the robbery at Oscar Roland's bank spread through the city like wildfire, Colonel von Wartenfels and his family heard of the accusation against Gustav only on the second day, when the papers contained a circumstantial account of the crime.

Fannie did not even know that her brother had left town; she had expected him in vain the day before, and quieted her anxiety with the assurance that there had been a reconciliation between him and his betrothed.

The dismay of the little group was, consequently, all the greater when the startling intelligence fell upon them like a bolt from the blue sky.

They were sitting at their breakfast in the most cheerful mood.

Kurt, who was first lieutenant in a regiment of hussars, was jesting with Fannie about some conquests which he pretended to have made at the theater the night before; the old colonel was smoking and reading his morning paper, which he could not do without at breakfast.

From time to time he would peep over the top of the paper, and his eye would rest for a while thoughtfully

on his handsome, stalwart son, who, breaking out into a loud laugh from time to time, twirled the ends of his brown mustache between his fingers, and seemed to know no care.

"No, Fannie, that won't do either!" exclaimed the young gentleman, gayly. "Of course, you are aware that I need only hold my hand out of the window to have each finger taken possession of by an awfully pretty, fascinating girl, who would be glad to share the weal and woe of life with me. But I haven't yet met the right one, who could tie me to her side, and as long as that don't happen I 'm willing to wait patiently."

"Will it ever happen?" asked Fannie, in the same bantering tone, as she peeped into the colonel's cup. "Uncle, you must empty your cup. Coffee ought to be hot."

"'Black like the devil, and sweet like love,'" added the old gentleman, handing her his cup without looking up from the paper. "The only sensible idea ever expressed by Talleyrand. It would be much better if diplomats would attend only to matters like that."

"Will it ever happen?" asked Kurt, taking up the broken thread again. "I hope so, Fan, for it would be dreadfully stupid to travel through this terrestrial turnip-field all by oneself."

"Well, if life appears to you even now like a tiresome turnip-field, I fear it will become a Desert of Sahara for you soon," said Fannie, mockingly. "I suppose you haven't been at Elm Court in some time?"

The colonel again looked over his paper, behind which the clouds of smoke rose up. It almost seemed as if he, too, were interested in this question.

"H-m! I haven't been invited," replied Kurt, twisting his mustache nervously.

"And does that keep you away?" asked Fannie, with

a laugh, as she filled his cup. "I didn't know you were so bashful."

"Why should I go there? Baron Busse is awfully rich—"

"And his only daughter, Vera, will inherit all his wealth some day, Kurt!"

"Thunder and lightning!" shouted the colonel at that moment. "If that isn't a lie I'll never trust any one again in all my life! When did you see Gustav last, Fannie?"

"Night before last, before his interview with Frau Winkler," replied the girl, turning pale with an anxious presentiment.

"Do you know anything of his having left town?"

"No, but he spoke of intending to do so if he and Dora should not be reconciled."

"And you have not heard from him since?"

"I had expected that he would let me know the result yesterday," replied Fannie, with increasing anxiety. "I cannot think that he would have left without bidding me good-by. And I had promised him, moreover, to call on Dora and try to clear up the misunderstanding between them, which had doubtless been caused only by malicious calumny."

"The colonel's eyebrows were angrily contracted; his fingers pulled restlessly, first at one side then at the other of his long mustache, and his gray head was more and more closely enveloped in thick clouds of smoke.

"It can't be true!" he muttered. "The son of my old friend, whom I have brought up, as it were, can't have brought such a disgrace upon me!"

"Why, what is it, papa?" asked Kurt, impatiently. "I can't think Gustav capable of any bad action."

"No, certainly not," said Fannie; "I would ask if he

had met with a misfortune, uncle, but you speak of disgrace—"

"Read for yourself," the old gentleman interrupted her, handing her the paper. "It can't be kept from you, at any rate.. If the editor has lied, he 'll have to answer for it to me, I promise him. Two hundred thousand thalers!" he continued, hoarsely, starting from his seat and striding up and down the room. "I don't believe Roland's whole property amounts to that. Thunder and lightning! It 's just a pack of lies!"

Fannie had read the article in feverish haste. With an exclamation of horror she threw down the paper and covered her face with her hands.

"That 's an outrageous affair," said Kurt, in dismay, when he had also looked over the article. "There must be a mistake of identity. The police are surely on the wrong track if they are following Gustav."

"Yes, that they are," replied Fannie, looking steadily at the colonel, who was still walking to and fro, in order to master his excitement. "Gustav has not done this deed—cannot have done it. I presume that he could not avert the rupture with Dora, and felt so angry and hurt that he left town at once. He had had a vehement quarrel with Herr Roland on the morning of that day and had thrown up his position in consequence. He told me that he could not stay here if his engagement were broken, because he would not expose himself to the spiteful scorn of Dora's relatives. If he had not carried out that unfortunate resolve, no suspicion would have fallen upon him, but the fact of his having done so is certainly no reason for condemning him."

"The janitor pretends to have seen him in Roland's house that evening," remarked the colonel.

"Is that a proof of guilt?" continued Fannie. "May not Gustav have wished to take some papers from his desk which he did not care to leave behind? And if the janitor says that he sneaked in secretly, that may be merely a supposition, uncle. It probably so happened that Gustav did not meet any one, and was only seen just as he was leaving the house."

"It is not to be believed that Gustav should have broken open that writing-desk and thrown the key into the garden," said Kurt, reflectively. "He could not hope to mislead the examining magistrate by such a maneuver as that."

"And it is just this maneuver which proves that some other person must have committed the theft," resumed Fannie, who had gradually recovered her equanimity. "It is probable that all the employees of the bank knew where that third key was kept, and through them others may have learned it. Good heavens! How horrible to think of Gustav perhaps being brought back here, handcuffed like a common criminal!"

"Thunder and lightning! I can't bear the thought of it!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Even though my own name is not disgraced by the matter, the shame falls upon that of the friend of my youth. I am thankful that your excellent father did not live to see this day—he, who was so strict and conscientious on every point of honor."

"We must do all in our power to avert this disgrace from our name, uncle," urged Fannie. "Gustav has no one but us to take his part; Dora's connections will triumph if he is convicted."

"And Dora herself?" asked Kurt.

"She has listened to the calumnies of her family and broken the engagement. What assistance can he expect from her? None at all! I will call on her, however,

and ask her how this all came about so suddenly. She must answer me, and I shall not leave her until I know all, and then I 'll open her eyes to the intrigues of her relatives and her companion. If Gustav had only listened to my warning! He would not believe that Sonnenberg was his secret rival."

"Theodor Sonnenberg?" Kurt interrupted her, in surprise. "What makes you think so? I know him pretty well, too!"

"He is not an acquaintance of whom you have reason to be proud. I think the man is an adventurer. It is only a supposition, to be sure; but I met him and Dora's companion in the street one day, engaged in very earnest conversation. They did not see me, and although I could not hear their words, it was evident from their gestures and the expression of their faces that their interview was a very confidential one."

"Well, that is not exactly a ground for suspicion," said Kurt, shaking his head. "Sonnenberg would hardly be so welcome a guest at our Casino if he were not a perfect gentleman, and he is, at the same time, extremely agreeable."

"All I know of him, too, is only to his credit," added the colonel, as he stopped at the table to relight his pipe and look over the newspaper article once more; "and I cannot judge of Dora's reasons for breaking the engagement, without knowing them. Altogether, we can form no decided opinion of the case without being acquainted with all its details, and, therefore, I approve decidedly of your intention, Fannie. Go to see Frau Winkler and talk the affair over with her; it certainly cannot be a matter of indifference to her whether her former lover is convicted or not; perhaps she will join forces with us for that reason alone. We can do nothing for the present, as far as I can see; we

must wait till Gustav returns, and then we can hear what he has to say for himself."

"Cannot we consult a lawyer and engage him as counsel?" asked Fannie, in a tone of entreaty. "Gustav, in his consciousness of being innocent, may not think of it."

"We will certainly do so," responded the old gentleman; "but the time for that has not yet arrived. We must wait and see, above all, whether Gustav really be arrested and indicted. They may have discovered something to-day which will avert suspicion from him. Lawyers do not give their services for nothing, so we 'll wait till we need one, and then we 'll apply to Doctor Kerner. He 's young, to be sure, but a shrewd lawyer and man of honor. When will you call on Frau Winkler?"

"At once, uncle," replied Fannie, with decision, as she rose hastily. "As soon as I have changed my dress, which will not take long."

"Very well. You had better take a cab. It would be unpleasant to have people staring at you or speaking to you in the street, as all your acquaintances who have read this article will be sure to do. That is the way of the world. People take pleasure in the misfortunes of others, even if they do pretend to sympathize and be sorry. Well, we won't despair yet," continued the colonel, drawing himself up to his full height, while his sonorous voice once more became firm and authoritative. "The hardest nuts have to be cracked. Fate demands it. Courage, then, and be ready for the attack, children. If we are in the wrong we'll put up our swords and capitulate as well as we can; but if we are in the right, the devil may thank the scoundrels whom we have to thank for this piece of bad news!"

He laid his hand caressingly upon Fannie's fair head

and kissed her on the forehead, and she forced herself to smile, as if to show him that she was as brave as he wished her to be.

She bade them good-by, and Kurt followed his father to the apartment which the old gentleman called his smoking-room, although the clouds of smoke which he blew from his pipe were wont to be seen in other parts of his lodging as well.

It was a plain room, furnished with a massive writing-table, a small book-case, several easy-chairs, and many embroidered cushions of various sizes and shapes, conducive to comfort.

Plaster busts of the king and queen, several sets of antlers, various pictures of famous race-horses, some engravings of battle-pieces and a large number of long and short tobacco-pipes decorated the walls, the paper on which had once been light, but was now yellow with tobacco-smoke.

The colonel seated himself at the table and motioned to his son to take a chair.

"This is a confounded affair," he said.

"A horrible affair," replied Kurt, twirling his mustache; "but I must repeat I do not believe in Gustav's guilt."

"Neither do I; but I am afraid it is going to give us a good deal of trouble."

"It falls hardest of all on poor Fan, however."

The colonel did not reply, but leaned his gray head on his hand and gazed thoughtfully before him for a while. It almost seemed as if he were seeking for words to express an idea which he was loath to give utterance to, while feeling the necessity of doing so.

"Kurt," he said at last, "what is Fannie to you?"

"That is a singular question, father—"

"Which I beg you to answer frankly."

"Well, it seems to me that you could answer it yourself," replied Kurt, in a cheerful, unembarrassed tone. "Fannie is the same to me now that she has always been —a dear sister."

"No more?" asked the old gentleman. "Have you never thought of asking her to be your wife?"

"Never, father; and I am convinced that Fannie herself has never thought of such a possibility."

"*Parole d' honneur?*" the colonel asked once more, extending his hand to his son.

"On my word of honor," replied Kurt, calmly, returning the pressure of his father's hand. "How came you to ask such a question?"

"It was a very natural one, you must admit," said his father, evidently pleased. "You have grown up together, and I know, by my own experience, what a love dating from early youth is. Well, and if it had been otherwise, I could not have said anything against it, my dear boy; for, in the first place, it would have been my own fault, and, on the other hand, the man is to be envied who wins that dear, excellent girl for a companion and helpmeet. I repeat that I should have given you my blessing; but as that is all that I can give you besides my unspotted name, I think it more sensible for you to look about for a wife who is favored, to some degree, with this world's goods."

"Goodness! I have never even given the matter a thought yet, father!" replied Kurt, with a laugh.

"I believe you. Young folks never think of the future and of old age. But it 's high time you should, Kurt."

"Do you really think so?"

"Would I say it if I didn't? It may be a long time yet before you are a captain, and a cavalry officer needs a good deal of money, for he has to live accord-

ing to his rank. You can't get along with your pay; you probably have debts even now."

"None of any importance," answered Kurt, lowering his eyes under his father's searching look.

"Perhaps not now, but in the course of years they may weigh very heavily," said the old gentleman, without taking his eyes off him, and those honest eyes spoke nothing but cordial interest and loving care. "I have not forgotten how it was in my own youth. I have seen many a fine fellow of a comrade wrecked on that reef."

"I shall be careful."

"I hope so, Kurt; but one can't always avoid temptation. Every officer has to be somewhat thoughtless in his youth; those who are not so are prigs, and they are never popular. And it is very hard to draw the line; the cup overflows all too easily, and a single hour may decide a man's whole future."

"You may be right," said Kurt, thoughtfully. "The most outrageous demands are often made on us, and a fellow can't always withdraw, however much he may wish to. But that can't be helped, father!"

"Yes it can, my boy! And, moreover, it is very easy to avoid all these demands and temptations," the colonel interrupted him, rising and taking a pipe from the wall. "A married officer has his own circles. He need not appear at the Casino at all or, at least, but rarely; no one is offended if he sees his comrades only on duty. And if he is so fortunate as to have a rich wife, he is safe for all time."

"A good prescription that, I must say," replied Kurt, laughing; "but at what apothecary's shop can I have it made up?"

"At Elm Court!" replied his father, in the same bantering tone. "Fannie gave you a hint to that effect a

while ago. I thought at first that there might have been some jealousy at bottom; but now that you have enlightened me on that point, I recognize how truly she is interested in your welfare."

"What good does all that do me, if Vera von Busse is not willing?" said Kurt, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I should not care to run the risk of a refusal from her, and, as far as I can judge, that result is far more probable than any other."

"And why?" asked the colonel, who had lit his pipe in the meantime.

"The baron's wealth—"

"Can do you no harm, my son. Hugo von Busse is my dearest friend. As young officers we were always together, and our friendship has never wavered even for a moment. Baron Hugo would not be richer to-day than I am if he had not married a rich wife."

"He has probably forgotten that by this time."

"No, he is not a man of that sort; and you need have no fear that he would refuse his consent if his daughter loves you. I know that he has a high opinion of you. And Vera is a fine girl in every respect, and well calculated to make you happy. But we have other things to think of for the present. So, consider the matter, my boy, and don't be afraid to go to Elm Court without an invitation. I 'm sure you will be well received. Faint heart never won fair lady, you know."

"That 's true," replied Kurt, with a nod. Then, taking out his watch, he continued: "But I must leave you now. I am on duty to-day. I 'll see you at dinner."

"And I 'll go and try if I can hear anything further about this sad affair," said the colonel, as his son left the room. Then, looking after him thoughtfully, he went on to himself: "It would be too bad if this fine

plan of mine should come to naught. Vera von Busse would be just the wife for him. She 'd hold the reins tight if the spirited horse wanted to kick. Well, I can't complain of him, on the whole; but I wish I knew whether he is in debt. I did not like the rumor that I heard to that effect a while ago. The deuce! What if it were true? And yet I can't believe it. Kurt surely would not have been so unembarrassed about it."

He clasped his hands behind him and paced to and fro for a while. Then he stopped to light his pipe.

"And now this dreadful thing about Gustav," he continued his soliloquy. "What if the boy had done the deed after all, in despair or in revenge! No one knows what a man may be capable of when he is bereft of his senses by uncontrolled passion. At such moments even the best can commit a crime without being conscious of doing any great wrong or considering the consequences. Well, we 'll see what I shall hear and what results Fannie's visit will have had."

And with this he left the room to prepare for his expedition.

When the little family met again, some hours later, all had learned that Gustav had been arrested the night before and brought back by rail, but that the money had not been found in his possession.

"And that is surely a proof of his innocence," said the old colonel, in a tone of triumph. "If he had committed the deed, would he not have been more careful to escape arrest? They certainly wouldn't have caught him so quickly. And what should he have done with all that money? I am convinced that all the evidence they have collected is only presumptive."

"Let them look for the money, and they will be sure to find the thief," said Kurt.

"I am more and more of the opinion that they need

not go far to find him," observed Fannie. "I learned from Dora, to-day that since the robbery Sonnenberg has become quite intimate at her house and takes Gustav's part. Of course, he does this only to ingratiate himself with her, and has succeeded so well that I could find no occasion to say a word of warning."

"He might do that merely to step into Gustav's shoes," remarked Kurt.

"Well," said the colonel, "I heard something at my club that seemed rather suspicious. Doctor Bruno, one of our members, was a guest at the wedding. I questioned him to-day, and he told me that about half an hour before the discovery of the theft Sonnenberg suddenly left the room under the pretense of having the nosebleed. Enough inquiries were made about him to render it certain that no one saw him from that moment until the time of the discovery. Every one thought that he had gone home, as would have been natural under the circumstances. Hardly, however, had Roland discovered the theft but Sonnenberg appeared to offer his services and take part in the investigation. Now, where had he been during all that time?"

"That is a question which probably no one but himself can answer," said Kurt. "But, as long as you have no better proof, it would hardly do to accuse him on the strength of that story. You might get yourself into trouble by it."

"I agree with you perfectly," replied his father. "But the fear of that will not deter me from following up this suspicion. Sonnenberg is intimate at the Rolands'. He may have learned where the third key was kept. The deed could be quickly done, and he would naturally manage to be on hand at the discovery, in order to fix suspicion upon another."

"If Sonnenberg were to hear of this conversation, he would challenge you, father?" said Kurt.

"He would have to prove first that my suspicion is groundless, and no one can blame me for defending the honor of my foster-son. I maintain that Gustav is innocent. If they asked me to put them on another track—"

"You had better not meddle with the matter yourself."

"No; I am too outspoken—too impulsive. Fannie and I are going to consult Doctor Kerner on the matter to-morrow."

"And in the meantime, Kurt," said Fannie, "you can help us a great deal by trying to find out something about Sonnenberg at the Casino. You might, by observing him closely, make some important discovery, which could be followed up by the authorities. You may find that Sonnenberg spends more money than heretofore. You may hear him make some remark which will throw light on our matter. You may see him handling bank-notes of large amount. In short, there are so many possibilities in that quarter that I can not help thinking that they may lead to some discovery."

"I 'll try my best, Fannie," replied Kurt. "And, moreover, I 'll not only take pains to find out something about his past life and his present circumstances, but will write to an old comrade of mine, who has just been transferred to Silesia, to make inquiries about the uncle whose heir-expectant he pretends to be."

CHAPTER V.

THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION.

When Gustav Dornberg appeared before Judge Hartmann for a preliminary examination, he displayed neither defiance nor an air of conscious guilt, but met his interlocutor with a frank, steady look, while the latter eyed him keenly for a while.

The judge had grown gray in his office. For many years past he had conducted the examinations in all difficult and complicated cases. He was wont to boast that his cross-questioning could not fail to involve even the most hardened offender in contradictions and lead him to confession.

He had proved this. In many obscure cases it had been owing to his indefatigable exertions alone that a criminal had been unmasked, in favor of whose innocence public opinion had already decided.

Possibly these successes had imbued him with a prejudice against all accused persons, which led him to take their guilt for granted from the first. He held that no one was ever charged with a crime against whom there was not a definite ground for suspicion, and there were always some proofs of guilt which afforded a starting-point for further pursuit and investigation.

At the same time the judge was fond of treating criminals, in the beginning, with an affability verging on cordiality, thus winning their confidence; though later, when he found that he could no longer gain anything by this manner, he would become keen and energetic; and in that case many a word, thoughtlessly uttered before, proved a snare which would force the accused to confess his guilt.

"I regret that I cannot give you more time for rest," he said, in a kindly tone, after he had polished the glasses of his spectacles and replaced the latter on his nose. "I am not at liberty to do so, although I know you must be fatigued with your journey; the object which we are seeking to recover is too valuable. If you will inform me where the missing money is to be found I am willing to postpone the examination until day after to-morrow."

"So you believe in my guilt?" said Gustav, somewhat bitterly.

"How can I do otherwise? All proofs point with certainty to you as the doer of the deed. It will avail you nothing to plead the irreproachable character you have hitherto borne, my dear sir, for every first crime is preceded by a good record. I will not deny, however, that there may be extenuating circumstances in your case, and you will find me willing to advance those circumstances in your favor, if you will facilitate my examination by a frank confession. Do not interrupt me, if you please," he continued, as Gustav seemed about to answer excitedly. "You surely cannot deny that you were in Herr Roland's house shortly before your flight, and that you entered it clandestinely?"

"I admit the former, the latter I do deny!" replied Gustav, in a firm, decided tone.

"You will no longer succeed by denying; I should

think you would realize that," said the judge, shaking his head, though his voice still sounded affable and kind. "You will only make my work more difficult by doing so and your sentence more severe. I will now go through the indictment. You are without means, but you had, in Herr Roland's banking-house, an excellent position and a good salary. Although you could live very well on that income, you yet found yourself obliged to run into debt. Young men are thoughtless; they want to enjoy life; and when their own means do not suffice for that they are apt to try their luck at play or on 'Change, and then it very often happens that their hopes are not fulfilled."

"If you apply that supposition to my case, it is a wrong one," answered Gustav.

"Indeed? Well, it may be that there was some other reason for your debts; or do you mean to deny that you received a loan of fifteen hundred thalers from Jacob Goldmann?"

"No, but I am pledged, by my word of honor, to withhold all information with regard to that debt."

'I suppose I need not direct your attention to the fact that this declaration cannot be advantageous to you."

"I fail to see the connection between that debt and the robbery of Herr Roland's safe."

The judge allowed his eyes to rest searchingly for a few moments on the young man, in whose features he saw only the expression of defiant stubbornness.

"Well, I will explain it to you," he said, adjusting his spectacles. "You shall become convinced of my perfect familiarity with the case, and that every attempt to mislead me must fail. As I observed before, you had contracted debts which you felt obliged to pay, and which you wished to conceal not only from Herr

Roland, but also from your foster-father, Colonel von Wartenfels. Under such circumstances the idea of a rich marriage is a very natural one; it is the most convenient method of getting rid of all one's difficulties. Your choice fell upon the wealthy and beautiful young widow, Frau Dora Winkler; the lady fell in with your wishes and engaged herself to you."

"Sir!" cried Gustav, hardly capable of controlling his vehement indignation.

"Wait a while," replied the judge, with an energetic motion of the hand. "Later on you may say whatever you wish to say in answer to my explanation, but for the present you must allow me to speak. You looked upon your engagement as a profitable investment; this is proved by the fact that on the very day of your betrothal you made that loan, and gave your creditors the name of your betrothed as security for its repayment. You obliged Goldmann to give you his word of honor that the matter should be kept secret; but it came to light, nevertheless, and Frau Winkler, deeply offended, canceled her engagement with you. Her connections had always opposed her marrying you. You were aware of this, and hated the family accordingly. Your hatred found expression the day before yesterday, when Herr Roland, who belongs to that family, permitted himself an allusion to the rupture of your engagement. You may not remember the words you said to him in your passionate excitement; but you ended by resigning your position in his bank. In the course of the day you received a letter from the lady, which formally gave you back your word. You called on her in the evening, but your efforts at reconciliation remained fruitless. You were dismissed. On this occasion you again gave vent to vehement invectives against the family, whom you accused of the lowest

intrigues, and finally, when you saw that all was over, hatred and a thirst for revenge induced you to avail yourself of your safe-key and combine the agreeable with the useful—that is to say, ruin Roland and place yourself in possession of a large sum of money, which would secure to you a life of ease in foreign lands. You knew that the safe contained a large amount. You had both the key of the safe and that of the cash-room in your possession. You also knew where the third key was kept, by means of which you could turn suspicion upon another person. You did not intend to remain in town at any rate, as you had lost your good position, your betrothed and your income.

"You had reason to expect bitter reproaches on the part of your foster-father," continued the judge, after a pause; "and the matter was sure to be commented upon by the public in a manner which would be unpleasant to you. Moreover, it was likely that you had not sufficient means for a long journey. In short, there were many circumstances which combined to confirm you in the execution of a plan which may have been formed without sufficient reflection. And you were favored in carrying it out by the entertainment at Roland's house. The front door was open. The attendants were all employed in the upper stories. You succeeded in entering the house, unperceived; and, when you were once in the cash-room, you had time enough to do your work without fear of interruption. You broke open Herr Roland's writing-desk, took out the third key and threw it into the garden. You left the window open, in order to give rise to the belief that the thief had entered from that quarter. But you forgot that a search would be made there for foot-prints, and it was this negligence which frustrated your plan. And, then, you were not aware that the janitor saw you

as you were leaving the house; you were too sure of yourself, and that is what has undone you. This, my dear sir, is my view of the state of affairs. I may enlarge upon the particulars at some future time, but I hope that you will spare me the trouble. You will, I trust, have recognized by this time that the proofs of your guilt are overwhelming, and that nothing is left to you but a frank confession. Tell me where you have concealed the money, and I will trouble you with no further questions."

Gustav slowly passed his hand over his brow and eyes; the bitter expression was still hovering about his mouth, but he looked the judge in the face freely and frankly.

"Where that money is to be found you will never learn from me, because I do not know," he said in subdued voice. "As truly as I stand here before you, I did not commit the deed of which you accuse me. I admit that I loaned that money of Goldmann; not for myself, but for another person, whose name I shall never disclose. If Goldmann broke his word, his rascally action does not give me the right to break mine; in that direction all your efforts will prove vain. It was most painful to me to give the name of my betrothed as security, but Goldmann insisted upon it, and I would not have received the loan if I had not submitted to that condition. But it is a falsehood and a calumny to say that I looked upon my marriage with a rich widow as a good stroke of business. Although such a confession may seem out of place here, I cannot refrain from making the solemn declaration that my engagement was founded on nothing but the purest, truest love. It is true, moreover, that the Roland family left nothing undone to separate us, and that they made use of lies and slander to gain their end. This

fully justified my dislike of them; but I have never thought of revenging myself on them in consequence."

"Such thoughts come to us involuntarily," remarked the judge. "Every one is apt to harbor revengeful feelings if he feels that he has been wronged."

"Well, it was not the case with me, nor did I have any time for such thoughts. I could never have believed that my betrothed would cast me off. It was only when she showed me the promissory note that a suspicion arose in my mind that all might be over between us. And when the last decisive words had been spoken, which cut me off from any further attempt at justification, I was resolved at once that I would not remain in this place an hour longer than necessary. My engagement with the rich widow had drawn upon me the envy and hatred of a number of persons. I knew well that they would now take every opportunity to jeer at and mortify me, and that Roland was at their head. I had thrown up my position, and there was nothing to keep me here; therefore, I would leave as soon as possible. I admit that many may wonder at this resolve. They may say that it would have been wiser to wait a few days, and to make one more attempt at a reconciliation. It is possible that others, in my place, would have acted thus. But it was repugnant to my feelings to beg where I was entitled to demand. I felt outraged that my betrothed had opened her ears to calumny and denied me faith and confidence. The blood boiled in my veins; and if I had met the slanderer face to face in that hour, it is quite possible that I might have committed a crime. I decided to take the midnight train, which would bear me far away before the next morning. I had already taken leave of my sister. She knew that I was determined to leave town in case a rupture should take

place between me and Frau Winkler; she could communicate this fact to my foster-father, to whom I intended to write shortly. I did not, indeed, have the means at hand for so long a journey, but there were two hundred thalers of my salary due me which I had not yet drawn. I had intended to save them toward paying my loan at Goldmann's. Now, however, I was obliged to use them for travelling expenses. At first I thought of sending for Roland, taking the amount owing me from the safe in his presence, and then handing the keys over to him. But I soon gave up this plan. If Roland should have been drinking, as was almost certain to be the case, and should say something to taunt or irritate me, I could not, in view of the rage boiling within me, answer for the consequences. It was better for me to avoid that possibility. The money was mine; no one could forbid my taking it. Nor did I wish to leave it behind. But I did not enter the house clandestinely—I walked straight into it, and it was immaterial to me whether any one saw me or not. If I had met the janitor I would have asked him to accompany me to the cash-room, but I did not see him. Then I took the money from the safe, exactly two hundred thalers, entered that amount in the cash-book and, having done this, I went to my lodgings, there to write a few lines to Herr Roland, seal up the keys and give orders to my landlady to take the letter and the keys to the bank the next morning."

"You wrote your order," said the judge, when Gustav paused. "Would it not have been better to give it to the woman verbally?"

"Frau Pauer had already retired. The few words which I wrote for her were quite sufficient. And, besides, I had no desire to discuss my resolve with the old woman, which she would doubtless have forced me

to do, if I had awakened her. And that I had no reason whatever for making a secret of my departure must be evident to you from all I have told you. If I were really the thief that I am supposed to be, I should probably have planned my flight in a different manner, and the authorities would not have found me so easily."

"Well, you seem to have thought of the other way, too," replied the judge, still retaining his affable manner. "You may have considered it more risky, for wherever you had gone the telegraph would have reached you. It was, therefore, wiser to divert suspicion to another party. This gave you time to place yourself and the money in safety."

"The money has not been found in my possession."

"I beg of you not to rest your defense on that; you would find yourself sorely disappointed! It happens constantly that thieves conceal the property they have stolen, and a package of bank-notes could be easily disposed of. You may have sent the money to some address in America, 'to be called for,' with the intention of asking for it on your arrival; you may also have hidden it here or elsewhere, for aught I know. It is even by no means impossible that you have destroyed the bills; indeed, I think this very probable, if you committed the robbery only to revenge yourself on Herr Roland. He has had to stop payment, and it is said that he will be ruined if he cannot recover the lost sum."

"I suspect that he was very near bankruptcy without that," said Gustav, shrugging his shoulders. "And if my suspicion is correct, nothing better could have happened to him than this robbery, which converts the disgrace of a failure into a misfortune for which he is not to blame."

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"It is hardly likely that you thought of that night before last," replied Judge Hartmann, in a more decided tone, "and I give you my word that by such reasons you will make no impression either on the court or the jury.

"An explanation to which they would be more likely to listen would be that you had been confused, completely out of your mind at the moment of the deed. If you wish to advance that plea, you will, above all, have to give information with regard to the whereabouts of the money, and I advise you, in your own interest, to do so. You will fare best by it."

"You refuse to believe me," said Gustav, angrily, while a dark glow suffused his pale face. "I cannot tell what I do not know, nor can I force you to place faith in my words. I must therefore leave it to you to continue to follow this wrong track and let the guilty party escape. In future you will—"

"You had better consider the consequences which will fall upon you through this stubborn denial," the judge interrupted him, in a tone of warning. "You are already convicted of the crime, even if the money should not be found. You can no longer clear yourself."

"Then I must bear patiently whatever fate has in store for me. My life's happiness is gone, at any rate."

"And honor and liberty were the stakes in this bold game which you now have lost. Well, as you like. I have shown you, in this hour, the kindly interest of a man who pitied you. I should have continued to do so if you had proved yourself worthy of such interest by a repentant confession. Henceforth you will find me only a stern judge."

"Then be a just one as well," said Gustav. "Do not follow this track alone; search for other traces, and do

not cling obstinately to the idea that I alone am the guilty one."

"Have you anything more to say," asked the judge, somewhat sarcastically.

"Only a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"That you will allow my foster-father or my sister to visit me."

"I regret that I cannot give that permission as long as you have not confessed your guilt."

"And may I not write to them?"

Possibly Judge Hartmann hoped to find, in these letters, some word which he might subsequently convert into a snare, for he gave the permission asked for after a moment's reflection, and then ordered the prisoner to be taken back to his cell.

He was still engaged in reading the minutes of this examination, when the usher informed him that Frau Roland wished to see him for a few moments.

The judge signified his readiness to grant this request. He conducted the lady, who appeared before him in an elegant toilet, to his private office and offered her the arm-chair which stood before his writing-desk.

"I beg a thousand pardons," she said, while her gray eyes rested upon his face in feverish expectation; "but my husband is terribly excited, as you can imagine, judge. Over an hour ago he expected to hear from you that the money had been found. He wanted to come here himself, but I was afraid to let him do so."

"I regret all the more that I have no good news to give you," he replied, in a tone of sympathy.

"The money was not found on the prisoner?" she asked quickly.

"No, only a small amount—about two hundred

thalers; and he refuses all information as to the whereabouts of the rest."

"Of course he denies the deed?"

"That was to be expected; but his denial will avail him little. He admits having been at your house night before last, but declares that he took only two hundred thalers from the safe, which amount was his by right. By this, of course, he hopes to invalidate the testimony of the janitor. But our practice has made us familiar with such subterfuges, and we know what to think of them."

"Then you have no doubt of his guilt," said Frau Roland, slowly.

"None at all, my dear madam. I need no farther proof."

"Is it not in Dornberg's favor that the money was not found in his possession?"

"By no means. That circumstance merely proves to me that the crime was chiefly an act of vengeance."

"That is my opinion, too," she replied. "He wished to revenge himself on us because he knew that it was by our efforts that my son-in-law's sister had been induced to break her engagement with him. Good heavens! If we could only have foreseen all this! And where are you going to look for the money now?"

"In the places where the accused is known to have been shortly before and after his flight."

"My husband is ready to double the reward offered."

"Quite unnecessary, my dear madam; the reward is large enough," said the judge, quickly; "and, moreover, it is a point of honor with the officials to secure the money."

"But what if it should not be found?"

"Then I shall look upon that fact as a confirmation of my suspicion that Dornberg has destroyed it."

Frau Roland stared at him for a few moments with wide-open eyes; the thought of such a possibility seemed to fill her with horror.

"Destroyed it?" she repeated in a trembling voice.

"That would complete the act of vengeance, for bank-notes that have been destroyed cannot be redeemed."

"You are right!" she said, with a deep sigh. "That plan may be called a devilish one, judge. On the one hand, its object is sure to be gained; on the other, a convincing proof of guilt is done away with. Dornberg will base his defense upon the fact that the money was not found on him. He has gone to work very shrewdly, I must say."

"It will do him no good; he cannot prove his innocence by that," replied the judge, calmly. "He certainly relies upon that fact; he told me so, but I have convinced him that it will avail him nothing."

"You feel sure that he will be convicted?"

"I should be very much surprised if the jury were to acquit him. I still hope, however, to induce him to confess."

"Do not hope that. I know his stubbornness; he has given us ample proofs of it. You will see that he will continue to deny his guilt even after he is convicted. The bank-notes destroyed! Good heavens, that is a possibility which my husband never thought of! I fear he will never get over this blow, for his honor is more precious to him than anything else."

"Would he really be ruined if the money is not found?" asked the judge, with sympathy.

"I fear so, though he has not spoken to me about it. A loss of two hundred thousand thalers is no trifle, judge, and Baron Busse will hardly be willing to forego the repayment of the lost money."

"The baron will be sure to give your husband time," said he, consolingly; "it is certainly a heavy blow, but he will get over it. A few fortunate years will make up for the loss, and, besides, it is not yet certain that the missing money will not be recovered."

"That is poor consolation," she replied, shaking her head. "I have given up all hope of that now. And we are not rich enough to retrieve such a loss easily. I ask your pardon once more, judge, for troubling you; but I felt as if I must have certainty. It is hard to have to live on the bounty of one's children," she added with a sigh, as her steel-gray eyes wandered restlessly about the room; "but if it has to be, we must bear it with patience and resignation. I thank you for the friendship you have shown me. You will be so kind, I trust, to let us know in case Dornberg should make a confession."

"Certainly, without a moment's delay," he replied, as he accompanied her to the door.

"I thank you once more. Unfortunately Dornberg has no property of his own by which we could indemnify ourselves for our loss. My husband intrusted him with the position of cashier, without security. Well, as I remarked before, it must be borne. Good morning, judge."

She left him with a bow and walked away proudly as ever, and the judge looked after the tall, slender figure admiringly. It impressed him deeply that this woman of the world submitted so calmly to the inevitable.

She, who until then had lived in splendor and luxury, had now a time before her which could bring her nothing but care and privation, and, as she said herself, it was indeed hard to be dependent on the bounty of one's children.

In front of the court-house a cab was standing. Frau

ROLAND'S WIFE RETURNED FROM HER VISIT TO THE JUDGE.—*See Page* 105.

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Roland entered it and soon after reached her residence. Although the bank had been closed since it had stopped payment, there was yet a coming and going at Roland's house which resembled that of a bee-hive.

Many persons of humble station had intrusted their small savings to the bank. The fear of losing this money prompted them all to demand the return of their deposits, and many of them did so in the rudest manner.

Others, business men, merely came to satisfy their curiosity; but the banker had tired of all these questions and reproaches very soon, and had withdrawn to the family rooms, leaving his bookkeeper to receive the visitors and confer with them.

Roland was sitting in the drawing-room with Theodor Sonnenberg and the councillor when his wife returned from her visit to the judge.

Bottles of Madeira and Bordeaux stood on the table, and the aromatic fragrance of superior Havanas pervaded the elegantly and comfortably furnished apartment.

The gentlemen rose, and Frau Roland, who had already divested herself of her hat and cloak, seated herself on the sofa.

She asked for a small glass of Madeira and, after taking a few sips of the fiery wine, reported her interview with the judge.

When she spoke of the possibility of the bank-notes having been destroyed, her husband stared at her as she had stared at the judge when he had mentioned the matter.

"In that case I may as well declare myself insolvent at once," he cried, as she ceased. "If I cannot recover the money, there is nothing else left me. The balance has been struck; the assets will give hardly thirty per cent."

"The deuce, don't get so excited!" cried the councillor, whose red face had assumed a chalky hue. "That last declaration can be deferred until we are quite certain what has become of the money. It is possible that the bank-notes have been destroyed; indeed, I am inclined to believe that it is the case, but we have no proof of it as yet."

"If it were not so, they would have been found on Dornberg's arrest," his mother-in-law interrupted him, in the sharp tone which, as he knew by experience, admitted of no contradiction. "We may therefore assume with certainty that that money is lost for us, and if that is the case it would be folly for us to defer the catastrophe much longer."

"Is there no way in which it might be prevented," asked Sonnenberg, looking keenly at the banker. "Just consider, if the step is once taken—"

"No, there is none," Roland interrupted him impatiently. "I cannot and will not ask my children to step into the breach for me with their own property, and moreover, they could not do it, for they are not rich enough."

"Well, well, I think we might manage it," said Heppner. "To be sure, we could not count on the Vienna branch of the family."

"I count on no one," Roland interrupted him. "I shall give my creditors what I have left, and that ends the matter."

"And if it has to be so, we want to have rest and quiet as soon as possible," added his wife, every feature of her thin face expressing calm resolution. "What Judge Hartmann told me sufficed to show that it would be foolish to retain any hope now. I will move out to our apartments in Léonie's villa to-day, Oscar; you can follow me as soon as you have surrendered your

books. You may succeed in making some arrangement with your creditors. At any rate, you must make the attempt."

She rose at these words. Her eyes rested firmly—it might almost be said with a commanding expression—upon her husband, who stared gloomily straight before him.

"But why such haste?" asked the councillor, shrugging his shoulders. "The creditors will surely hear reason. The most impatient among them might have their claims satisfied at once. The others can wait. The loss is a misfortune for which papa can not be held accountable. We 'll call a meeting of the creditors and lay the balance before them, and then I will address them and make various propositions, one or the other of which will surely be accepted."

"Yes, we will try that," replied Roland, raising his head. "Let us go to my office, Heinrich, and draw up the circular for the creditors."

Herr Sonnenberg leaned back in his armchair and played carelessly with his gold-rimmed eyeglass.

"If I were in possession of the fortune which I hope to inherit from my uncle in Silesia, it would be the greatest pleasure to me to extricate you from all these difficulties," he said, in a tone full of sincere sympathy; "but as I am situated just at present, I cannot, unfortunately—"

"We do not doubt your friendship and are very grateful for your sympathy," interrupted Frau Roland. "You may be the only friend who will cling to us firmly and faithfully. But even if you could help us we would not accept your aid, for in my opinion our case would not be bettered if my husband should use another person's money to prop his tottering business."

"No, indeed," said the banker, who, in the meantime,

had emptied his glass, lit a cigar and risen from his chair; "that would help me very little, for there would be but a slight difference, after all, between my owing the money to you or to some one else. And to others I could propose a settlement, which would be out of the question with you. And now, Heinrich, come, we will go to work at once."

The vivacious councillor followed his father-in-law without delay.

Sonnenberg, too, seemed on the point of taking his leave.

"If you have a few moments more to spare, you would oblige me by remaining," said Frau Roland, as she looked at a plain black trunk which stood in a distant part of the room. "You see how thoroughly my husband approves of my views in this matter. There is my trunk, ready packed; after dinner I shall remove to my daughter's villa. Who would have thought of this when we bought it!"

"If I am rightly informed, you have reserved rooms for yourselves in the villa?" asked Sonnenberg, casting a keen look at his hostess.

"Yes, we did so. It was our intention to spend our declining years there in quiet. When parents have married off all their children, the time soon comes when they long for rest. But we did not suspect that it would come to us in this way. It is hard, but it cannot be helped. And you will remain our friend, will you not?" she asked, as she extended her slender hand to him. "You will not turn from us and forget us?"

He drew her hand to his lips and shook his head, with a reproachful look.

"How can you think of such a possibility?" he said. "You know that I am proud of your looking upon me as a friend."

"An old adage says that misfortune knows no friends."

"Whoever invented that adage probably had himself to blame for it if he had not sincere and faithful friends. No, my dear madam, you may rest assured that it is just this misfortune which has caused my friendship for you to take root more firmly and deeply even than before; and I wish nothing more fervently than that some occasion might occur for me to prove this to you."

"I thank you," she replied graciously. "The occasion which you desire may not be far distant. I know the world and how every one will attack us, without any consideration for our misfortune—how all our friends will desert us—"

"No, indeed! I shall defend you, and I advise no one to say a word against you in my presence."

"And I will prove myself grateful as far as I possibly can. You love Dora. All that it is in my power to do toward the fulfillment of your wishes shall be done."

"For the present I shall be obliged to forego your assistance in this matter," he replied, with a significant smile. "I think it will be better that you should make it appear to the charming widow as if such a union were perfectly indifferent to you. All is fair in love and war, you know," he continued, breathing on his eyeglasses before polishing them with his handkerchief. "I have no doubt you will approve of the stratagem to which I have resorted. It was to be expected that, in spite of the breaking of her engagement, Frau Winkler would defend her former lover against what she declared a dishonoring accusation, and that her whole anger would turn against those who, in her opinion, had brought about the breach."

"And I am one of them, I suppose?" she asked, sarcastically.

"Of course," he continued. "You, your husband and the councillor. I therefore resolved to take sides against you, to regard Dornberg's guilt as an impossibility, and to place my advice and aid at the lady's disposal."

"Was not that a rather bold game?"

"Not at all. Yesterday morning she denied herself to me, but the companion had the kindness to receive me and listen to my explanations. And on the strength of those explanations I was invited to repeat my call last evening. I think I may say that I played my part extremely well. The fair widow was delighted with the warmth with which I defended Dornberg. I shall continue the defense to-day, and, in addition, report to her the result of the preliminary examination, which I learned from you a while ago."

Frau Roland had contracted her reddish eyebrows; her features expressed serious anxiety.

"I cannot deny that your plan is well designed, but it seems to me that you have not taken into sufficient consideration the possibility of Dornberg's being acquitted."

"Such a possibility does not exist for me!"

"Dornberg is not as friendless as you seem to think; his uncle will do everything in his power to secure his acquittal, and Dora will not hesitate to make the greatest sacrifices for the same end."

"And whatever may be done to gain that object in one direction or another, I shall be informed of," replied Sonnenberg, calmly. "It is hardly necessary, I suppose, for me to assure you that I shall secretly work against the object in question?"

"I am greatly relieved to hear you say so," said she, drawing a deep breath, while a satisfied smile drove the dark shadows from her brow. "If Dornberg should

be acquitted, it is not impossible that Dora may receive him with open arms. Consider that well, my dear friend ; a woman's heart is incomprehensible !"

"Make yourself easy," he replied, as, bowing slightly, he once more drew her hand to his lips. "Such a contingency is not to be thought of. Be so kind as to leave the execution of this plan to me alone for the present, my dear madam !"

"Gladly," she said ; "I will observe from a distance until you tell me that you desire my assistance."

"That is just what I was about to ask you ; many thanks. Yo will permit me to pay my respects to you at the villa to-morrow ?"

"You will be very welcome."

Bowing once more, he bade her adieu and left the room ; and, as he closed the door, a malicious gleam flashed from his dark eyes.

"How differently she would speak if I were to tell what I know !" he said to himself, as he slowly descended the stairs. "Pah, one must know how to wait till the right moment comes, and it will come in this case, too !"

He cast a sneering glance at the banker's private office as he passed it, condescendingly returned the bow of the janitor who opened the door for him, and left the house with a cheerful air, humming an opera tune.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE CASINO.

It was early when Kurt von Wartenfels reached the Casino that evening, fully prepared to enter upon his investigations. He soon discovered Sonnenberg in the reading-room, where, with a bored air, he was looking over a newspaper which, evidently, did not interest him in the least.

Kurt stepped behind his chair and bent down to him.

"Could you spare me fifteen minutes in the course of the evening?" he said, in a low tone.

Sonnenberg looked up and laid down the paper.

"At once, if you like," he said, rising from his seat. "There is nothing worth reading in the paper, and I am glad to find something else to do."

He took Kurt's arm and went with him to a small room which seemed expressly made for a confidential talk.

There he lit his cigar by the gaslight, and then, still with a bored look, stretched himself in a comfortable red-plush easy-chair.

A waiter appeared. Kurt ordered half a bottle of wine for himself.

Sonnenberg looked up in surprise.

"Shall we not take a bottle in common?" he asked.

"Not to-night," replied Kurt, who already felt a secret dislike to the man. "I want to go home early, and therefore prefer to be free to leave at any time."

"Well, just as you please. You may bring me half a bottle of Moselle too, then," he added, turning to the waiter. "And now, my dear fellow, go ahead and unburden your heart. What can I do for you?"

"I merely wish to speak to you about this robbery at Roland's, with regard to which you must naturally know more than I do."

"I am entirely at your service."

The return of the waiter here interrupted the conversation for a few moments.

Sonnenberg filled his glass and drained it slowly. Then he leaned back in his chair and fixed his eyes, in calm expectation, upon the young officer.

"I have heard that Roland intends to propose a settlement to his creditors," Kurt began, when the waiter had left the room. "How can he know with certainty that he will not recover the stolen money?"

"Because it was not found in Dornberg's possession."

"I should consider that a proof that Dornberg did not commit the deed."

"Judge Hartmann draws a different inference. He thinks Dornberg destroyed the notes."

"Were you not present when the theft was discovered?"

"I was."

"You were Roland's guest that evening?"

"At his daughter's wedding," replied Sonnenberg. "I was on the spot immediately after the discovery."

"Were you also at once convinced of Dornberg's guilt?"

"Less so than Councillor Heppner. Roland, on the other hand, took his part."

"Then Roland must have suspected some one else."

"Hardly. The matter was a complete mystery to him. You know he had always had the fullest confidence in his cashier."

"And now that same cashier is supposed to have sudddenly turned into a consummate rascal?" asked Kurt, indignantly.

"You must be acquainted with the circumstances which brought about such a transformation. His rupture with Frau Winkler—"

"The cause of that rupture is not clear to me at all."

"What! Are you not aware that Dornberg was over head and ears in debt?"

"I never heard a word about it."

"Well, that is quite possible. Dornberg may have had his reasons for concealing his levity and his extravagance from those who were nearest to him. And yet they were pardonable. Which of us has not been thoughtless in his youth? Every man has a time when he likes to spend money lavishly, so as to enjoy his life to the full. We should not be too scrupulous in that respect, you must admit that. But when a man, on the very day of his engagement, gives the name of his betrothed as security to a money-lender, in order obtain a loan, and makes out a written promise to that effect, it does not speak very well for his sense of honor."

"And Dornberg is supposed to have done that?" asked Kurt, staring fixedly at Sonnenberg.

"Yes, that is what he did."

"May I ask you to tell me the money-lender's name?"

"Jacob Goldmann."

"And what was the amount of the debt?"

"Fifteen hundred thalers."

"The promissory note bears the date of the day on which Dornberg became engaged to Frau Winkler?"

"That is what I said."

"The deuce! Then you will have the goodness to tell me, too, how you came to know about all this?" cried Kurt, in vehement excitement.

A mocking smile flitted across Sonnenberg's pale face. He slowly passed his hand over his long black beard.

"If you do not believe what I have told you, you may ask Frau Winkler," he said coolly. "She paid the debt and destroyed the note."

Kurt started from his chair and stamped his foot angrily.

"Why did she do that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Why, what have you to with the matter?" replied Sonnenberg, looking up at him in surprise. "How can the payment of that debt affect you?"

Kurt bit his lip and resumed his seat. He wiped his damp brow with his handkerchief and drank a glass of wine.

"My excitement must surprise you," he said, after a pause, having regained his composure. "But if you consider the matter, you will understand that it cannot be quite indifferent to me. Dornberg is my foster-brother, and I, for my part, would consider it an insult if a lady were to pay my debts behind my back. You must admit that Frau Winkler had no right whatever to take such a step—"

"Pardon me. I agree with you in every other particular, but not in that one. Dornberg could only pay the debt in case his marriage to Frau Winkler came to pass. After his rupture with her it was no longer pos-

sible for him to do so. Goldmann would, of course, not have given up his claim to the money, but, on the contrary, would have sued Dornberg, and in that case Frau Winkler had reason to expect that her name would be made public. Can you blame her for trying to prevent this by payment of the debt? I can see nothing in that which should subject her to reproach, and if she broke the engagement in consequence she was fully justified in that as well. With regard to the debt itself, Dornberg refused to give her any explanation, though I doubt whether his reasons for so doing were very urgent ones."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, if it had not been so he would probably have given them, in order at least to attempt to exonerate himself."

"Did he make no such attempt?"

"No; he contented himself with declaring that he had pledged his word of honor not to disclose anything with regard to the debt."

"And that was the truth!"

Theodor Sonnenberg fixed his gold eyeglasses upon his nose and looked at the young officer for a few moments in astonishment.

"So you are aware of his reasons?" he then asked. "You know why he had to keep that debt secret?"

"I shall not betray him," replied Kurt, tossing back his head. "If he will not tell his reasons I am not authorized to do so."

"I do not ask you for them," said Sonnenberg, with a penetrating look at Kurt's angry face. "Indeed, the whole matter is perfectly indifferent to me."

"I have been told that you took my foster-brother's part," replied Kurt. "If that is true, the matter can hardly be as indifferent to you as you say it is."

"Well, yes; I did defend him at first," Sonnenberg continued, shrugging his shoulders. "But I never felt any deep interest in him; and now, on the contrary, I have arrived at the conviction that he must be the guilty party. My chief regret is that Roland has been ruined by his deed."

"And I cling to the hope that the examination will produce a different solution to the riddle," said Kurt, emphatically.

"We will wait and see which of us is right."

"Do you intend to remain in town much longer?"

"Certainly! Why do you doubt it?"

Sonnenberg's searching look was somewhat embarrassing to Kurt; he turned and refilled his glass.

"I did not express any doubt," he said; "but I remember hearing you say, a few days ago, that you would soon return to Silesia. Have you not an uncle there?"

"Certainly!" replied Sonnenberg, with apparent indifference, though his keen glance was still fixed upon Kurt. "I may have said that I should visit him, but in that case I should be gone only a few days."

"Do you think of settling down here?"

"I do not know yet."

"I suppose your decision depends upon circumstances?"

"You are right! Pray come in, doctor!"

Kurt, who sat with his back to the *portière*, looked round; he did not know the officer who had just entered the room.

The new-comer was some years older than he, and wore the uniform of a first lieutenant of infantry. He had a manly, pleasant face, and Kurt was particularly struck by the clear, intelligent eyes which sparkled behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Lieutenant von Wartenfels—Doctor Kerner." Sonnenberg introduced the two to each other.

"Not Doctor Kerner, the lawyer?" asked Kurt, in surprise.

"The same," replied the doctor. "On duty just at present, as you see, in fulfillment of my obligations as a reserve-officer. If you will permit me, gentlemen, I will join you for a few moments."

The presence of a third party put an end to the conversation hitherto carried on, nor did Sonnenberg seem to regret this. He avoided, henceforth, addressing himself directly to Kurt, and found it all the more easy to do so, as the doctor displayed great conversational talent.

Now and then, indeed, an allusion was made to Sonnenberg's personal relations, but Kurt learned nothing new in that way, or, at any rate, nothing which could have facilitated the fulfillment of his task.

The conversation also turned upon the robbery at Roland's. Kurt brought up the subject. Doctor Kerner seemed to have given his attention to the matter, for he appeared well-informed with regard to it, and was even acquainted with the statements of the accused at the first examination.

Sonnenberg once more put on his bored look. He declared openly that he had heard and talked so much on that subject that he was tired of it, and that he therefore preferred to go to the card-room

With this he took his leave.

Kurt breathed more freely, and the doctor, too, sent a look after him which expressed anything but regret.

"I have a favor to ask of you, doctor," said Kurt, after a pause. "You are aware that Gustav Dornberg is my foster-brother; his sister is an inmate of our family: and we all—she, my father and I—are convinced

of Gustav's innocence. My father intended to ask you to act as his counsel. Perhaps he has already informed you of it—"

"Yes, this morning," the lawyer interrupted him. "He is going to call on me to-morrow."

"Might I ask you to accompany me to our house this evening?"

The doctor looked at his watch.

"This evening?" he said, hesitating. "I fear I should inconvenience your family."

"It is not very late. Father and Franciska do not retire early, and we can offer you a glass of wine at any time."

"Well, if you will take the responsibility, I accept with pleasure. We may be able to discuss the subject more calmly and thoroughly to-night than could be done to-morrow, when I shall be obliged to give my thoughts to other matters as well."

Some minutes later the two gentlemen left the Casino, and on the way to his house Kurt briefly communicated to the doctor the circumstances which had caused his family to suspect Sonnenberg.

The lawyer did not remark upon them; he seemed to share the views of the examining magistrate, and to wish merely to confine himself to finding extenuating circumstances in favor of Dornberg's guilt, on which he could base his defense.

As Kurt predicted, they found the colonel sitting in the drawing-room over a bottle of wine, while Fannie kept him company with her work, and both expressed their gratitude to Kurt for having brought the lawyer home with him, and received the latter with a degree of cordiality which impressed him most agreeably.

The colonel offered his guest a cigar, and ordered more glasses and another bottle of wine. In the mean-

time Fannie's eyes were fixed searchingly upon the grave, intellectual face of the lawyer, as if she was trying to discover whether she could trust him implicitely.

Once, as his eyes sought her lovely, anxious face, he intercepted her searching glance, and at that instant he was seized with the feeling that he must prove himself worthy of her confidence, and do all in his power to realize the hopes which she placed in him, even to giving up his life, if necessary.

From that moment he gave his whole attention to the matter under discussion; entered into all the reasons which the colonel gave for his suspicions against Sonnenberg, and before long he, too, was convinced of Gustav's innocence.

For, how could he resist the pleading look of Fannie's dark-blue eyes which, with their mute and yet eloquent language, implored him to restore honor and liberty to her unhappy brother? How they flashed with anger when, at one time, he remarked that all the proofs were against the accused!

"They are only apparent proofs, doctor!" the girl cried indignantly. "They have no more value than the calumnies by which Dora Winkler was induced to break the engagement; and those calumnies, too, were originated by Sonnenberg. Who sought out and found the promissory note at Goldmann's, or possibly discovered it there accidently? Who, of all Dora's acquaintances, would be likely to have any relations with such a man? No one but Sonnenberg, who has probably been obliged to apply to him for aid often enough?"

The doctor looked at the fair speaker in surprise. There was a great deal of truth in her words, the bearing of which struck him at once.

"And the reasons which induced him to seek for the

note are plain enough," Fannie continued, after a short pause, without allowing herself to be abashed by the admiring glance which the lawyer now fixed upon her. "All his efforts were aimed at separating those two, so that he could win Dora for himself. I feel more and more convinced that he is in league with Dora's companion, Frau Hennig, and has secured her assistance in the furthering of his object. I have seen the two engaged in confidential conversation, and I am not deceived by the mask behind which they conceal themselves. And a man who can resort to such actions in order to gain his selfish ends is capable of anything."

"There 's a good deal in that," said the colonel. "Don't you think so, doctor?"

"I do not deny it," replied Kerner, adjusting his spectacles. "I have no nearer acquaintance with Sonnenberg. He has, indeed, made approaches to me, but, as I did not respond very cordially, nothing came of the friendship which he seemed to desire. I shall now inquire more particularly into his past and his circumstances. Unfortunately, it will have to be done secretly, which will make any investigation much more difficult."

"Would it not be well to examine all the persons who were in Roland's house that evening?" inquired the colonel. "Their testimony might prove very important. We might possibly discover in that way that Sonnenberg had no nosebleed at all."

"I shall do everything that can be done," the doctor interrupted him; "but we must not forget that we cannot proceed openly against Sonnenberg. If he is guilty he will keep a close watch over our movements, and, as there is not the slightest suspicion against him, we could not prevent his leaving town."

"I fear you will accomplish very little in that way,"

remarked Fannie; "for no other reason than that Sonnenberg will naturally keep his eye on you as soon as he hears that you are to be my brother's counsel. Would it not be more advisable to put the matter in the hands of an official of the criminal police? I have heard that there are very able men among them."

"Certainly," replied Kerner, thoughtfully; "and I was thinking of that myself a while ago. But before I make definite arrangements I would like to have an interview with my client—"

"Do you still doubt his innocence?" Fannie quickly interrupted him, in a reproachful tone.

"No, my dear young lady, you have convinced me of that. Nevertheless, a personal conference is not only desirable, but necessary; it is possible that I may gather some important hints from it. I suppose you cannot tell me anything about that debt?"

"No," replied the colonel, and Fannie shook her head, while Kurt rose and walked to the window. "It is a mystery to us, which we cannot solve. Gustav had no bad habits; he could live very well on his salary—"

"He even had a surplus," said Kurt; "I happen to know that."

"And yet he was in debt to so large an amount?" asked the doctor, incredulously. "He has not denied it; he merely said that he had pledged his word of honor to keep the matter secret."

"That certainly sounds strange," said Fannie, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "But that debt has nothing to do with the crime of which he is accused."

"No; yet the attorney-general will probably refer to it in order to prove that the crime may have been committed from some other motive than revenge. He may take the ground that the accused was a secret gambler or spendthrift, and such an assertion would, unfor-

tunately, be confirmed by the fact that your brother refuses to give any information with regard to that."

"Well, in that case Gustav will have to speak out," said the colonel. "Whom can he possibly have given his word of honor to? I shall write to him, and tell him to clear up the matter."

"That would, indeed, be the best thing he could do," remarked the lawyer, as he rose. "Everything ought to be perfectly clear, so that the prosecution can not gain a firmer foothold than it has already. And now leave the rest to me. I will not say that you are to do nothing to assist me, but I must warn you against any imprudence, which might frustrate all my efforts. You understand me, I hope."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the colonel, pulling restlessly at his long mustache. "We will observe in secret and inform you of the discoveries which we may make."

"I have the fullest confidence in you," said Fannie, giving her hand to the lawyer, and her eyes were once more fixed on him entreatingly. "All that is most precious to my dear brother is at stake—his honor and his liberty."

He held her little hand firmly in his own and looked deep into her large, beautiful eyes.

"I will spare no trouble, and am ready to make any sacrifice to preserve them for him," he said, in a tone which was at the same time resolute and warmly sympathetic; "and I hope that I shall succeed."

"I shall thank you for it all my life."

"And my best thanks will be the certainty of having delivered you from a heavy sorrow."

He took his leave with a hasty bow, and left the room accompanied by Kurt.

"I am very grateful to you for having procured me

the pleasure of Fräulein Dornberg's acquaintance," he said, as they went downstairs. "The young lady seems to be very much attached to her brother. Has she no relatives but him!"

"No," replied Kurt, passing his hand over his forehead like one who awakens from a bad dream; "though she is like a daughter and sister to my father and myself."

"Indeed! And has this lovely girl not yet met any man who could touch her heart?" asked the doctor, assuming a facetious tone. "I can hardly believe that."

"And yet it is true."

"Oh, then, I may presume that this rare pearl is destined for you? Indeed, lieutenant, you are to be envied."

Kurt looked at him for a few moments in surprise; then he burst out laughing.

"I take it for granted that you are not married, my dear sir?" he asked, with slight sarcasm.

"No, I have had no time for that."

"Nor engaged?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, your own questions have raised a suspicion in my mind."

"Lieutenant," said the doctor, his face flushing, "I trust you will not doubt that I am a man of honor."

"By no means. On the contrary, if you really entertain the wish which your questions imply, you may be assured that I shall be most happy to do all in my power toward its fulfillment."

"Are you in earnest?" exclaimed the doctor, joyfully, offering Kurt his hand.

"*Parole d'honneur!*" replied Kurt, with a hearty grasp. "Only do not be in too great a hurry, my dear

fellow. You will have to possess your soul in patience until this burden is lifted from Fannie's heart."

Doctor Kerner assented, shook hands with Kurt once more and left; while the young officer, sighing deeply, mounted the stairs again.

Fannie had just folded her work and was about to light a candle to retire to her bedroom, when Kurt asked her, in a singularly grave tone, to wait a few minutes.

"It is a terribly disagreeable affair," he said nervously, twisting the ends of his mustache; "but I cannot keep the secret any longer. I never would believe it till now; but it 's a bitter truth, after all, that we are punished, at some time or other, for all the wrong we do, and may the devil take all bad habits! I want to tell you that Gustav's debt concerns me, and that I am the one who owes Goldmann that money."

"Thunder and lightning!" cried the colonel, his eyes flashing with anger. "You in the power of a money-lender, Kurt? And you tell me this only now, when it may be too late to prevent the terrible consequences of your folly."

"No, no, papa! Things are not as bad as that; but they are bad enough, and I knew nothing about it until this evening. You recollect Captain Baldring, I suppose. We always called him Black Baldring. He was a sharp fellow, and more feared than liked."

"Certainly! Who could forget him?" replied the colonel, in whose features a feverish suspense was depicted. "I remember very well what a sensation was created by his sudden death. Rumor spoke of an accident, but secretly it was said that Black Baldring had shot himself intentionally."

"And that was the truth," said Kurt, in a low voice, taking Fannie's work in his trembling hand and staring

fixedly at it. "We had given our word to each other to keep that truth a secret, and I must ask you to consider yourselves bound in the same way. Black Baldring was a passionate gambler; he seduced every one with whom he became acquainted. We younger officers, in particular, were the ones toward whom his efforts were directed. It was no use for us to resist or try to evade him; we had to consent, if we did not wish to listen to the most cutting remarks. There were many among us who were only too willing to yield to such a temptation, and who never seemed to notice that Black Baldring invariably had the most marvelous luck; it was only later that our eyes were opened on that point. Well, I had kept out of his way for a long time, for I did not like the excitement of gambling, and, besides, I had promised you to shun the green table. I suppose that vexed him, and I still believe that he was only waiting for an opportunity to prove to me how easily the firmest principles can be overthrown."

He dropped Fannie's work and hastily drank a glass of wine. Then he clasped his hands behind his back and paced up and down the room several times, with long strides.

Fannie's eyes followed his every movement. The old colonel stroked his mustache and stared gloomily before him.

"One evening we had a champagne supper at the Casino," Kurt continued. "It was given in honor of a guest—a Baron Reuben—who had formerly belonged to our regiment. The baron was a wealthy man, and Baldring had designs upon him. When the older officers left the fun began, and Baldring had managed matters so that I was forced to take part in it, if I did not want to subject myself to sneering remarks, which would have led to a duel."

"The deuce! I know what that is," muttered the colonel. "I have been in just such a fix more than once in my young days. There's the devil to pay when a man is no longer master of his will."

"That was the way with me that evening. I could find no pretext of which I could suppose that it would be accepted; and, when I had once begun, I was obliged to go on. And I'll just confess that, when the passion was once awakened within me, I could no longer keep it under control. We played high and on our word of honor, a fashion introduced among us by Baldring. Small amounts were paid at once. Larger ones were noted down, and the debts accruing from them had to be paid within three days. I won a small sum in the beginning. Then I lost, and, to retrieve my loss, I did like the others; I doubled my stakes, which only increased my losses. At first, Black Baldring kept the bank; he won tremendously. Then Reuben took his place, and Baldring grew more and more excited. At last he insisted on taking the bank again. Reuben gave it up to him, and it was agreed upon that only a short game should be played. We had hardly commenced again when something unheard of happened. Reuben rose from his seat, laid his hand upon the cards which lay in front of Baldring, and said to us, in a grave tone, that Captain von Baldring was a dishonorable swindler. Well, you can imagine the general excitement and confusion. Baldring challenged Reuben and demanded instant satisfaction, but not one of us would take his side, after Reuben had proved the truth of his accusation. Black Baldring went off in a towering rage; the next day he was dead."

"So that was the way of it," said the colonel. "Nothing was said about that at the time. There was

a talk of debts, of an unhappy love affair, but nobody knew the exact reason."

"We all pledged ourselves to secrery that same evening. We supposed Baldring would resign; if he did not, we were determined to force him to do so, but no one besides us was to know of his disgrace. Baron von Reuben, on whom almost all Baldring's claims had devolved, wished to cancel them, but we could not accept that. Reuben had won those sums at honest play. My share of the claims was fifteen hundred thalers, and I cannot describe to you how I felt that night. I can assure you that I have never touched a card since. Within three days the money had to be paid, and I did not dare confess my fault to you, papa, not only from fear of your reproaches, which I knew I deserved, but also because I was convinced that you could not help me, and I wanted to spare you the sorrow and anxiety which I knew my confession would cause you. If I did not pay, my honor was lost, and I did not know where to get the money. In my distress I confided in Gustav; he was in the happiest mood, for he had become engaged that very day. He was ready at once to help me. He concluded to borrow the money in his own name and pay it back after his marriage, then I could repay him later, when I was so situated as to be able to do so. He gave it to me that same evening, but he did not tell me on what conditions he had obtained it. He passed lightly over the matter with a cheerful laugh and told me not to trouble myself about it; that Goldmann did not know that he had borrowed the money for me, and then he gave me his word of honor that no one should hear of it. Well, he has kept his word, but I suppose the matter cannot be concealed any longer."

"No," said the colonel, sadly, while Fannie covered

her eyes with her hand; "if for no other reason than because Frau Winkler has paid the debt."

"And Dora must be informed that Gustav was not to blame in that case," added Fannie.

"Yes, indeed," said Kurt; "that reproach must be taken from him, even if I have to suffer for it."

"You will not escape that," replied the old gentleman, casting a look of censure upon his son. "I should be justified in reproving you severely, but nothing would be changed or bettered by that. And, moreover, I can well understand how, on that occasion, you were forced to do as the others did, for, as I said before, I have been in similar situations myself. I hope you will not forget this lesson."

"Never, as long as I live!" declared Kurt.

"And in future be careful to avoid such temptations. It would have been better if you had confided in me at the time; but, to be sure, I could not have helped you any more quickly or more effectually than Gustav did. He is a fine fellow. He has kept his word. I must give him credit for that."

"And I cannot see why that debt should aggravate the accusation against him," said Fannie. "It would certainly be better if the explanation which Kurt has given us should not be made public."

"If it can be avoided," replied the colonel, slowly, as he gazed before him, lost in thought. "Yes, it would be better; but we must pay no regard to that if Gustav's acquittal depends upon it. Well, I 'll speak to Frau Winkler. We owe her this explanation, but it would not do for you to make it, Fannie. I will do so as soon as I have obtained the money with which we must, of course, repay her. And then we 'll see what can be done," he continued, as he approached the table in order to light a candle. "Of course we must tell

Doctor Kerner about the matter. We can trust to his discretion."

He was about to leave the room when Kurt stepped quickly in front of him and asked his forgiveness for the sorrow which he had caused him.

The old gentleman pressed his hand in silence, and, without another word, they separated, to seek the rest which they so sorely needed after all the excitement of the day.

CHAPTER VII.

A FORGOTTEN PROMISE.

Ernestine's advice proved excellent. Theodor Sonnenberg, by his warm defense of Gustav, speedily won Dora's favor.

Even when she told him that she had broken her engagement, and informed him of her reasons for doing so, he continued to express doubts of Dornberg's guilt and to seek for the real criminal.

At one time he cast suspicion upon the janitor, who, as he said, might just as well have done the deed. Then, when Dora would not enter into this idea, he spoke of the extra servants who had been engaged for the night. Another time he thought it quite possible that the thief might have entered from the outside, even though the commissioner of police had discovered no footprints in the courtyard and the garden.

All these suppositions, of course, led to no result, but Dora Winkler looked upon them as proofs that Sonnenberg was taking a great deal of trouble in the matter in order to please her, and she felt heartily grateful to him for it.

And if, at times, a distrust of the sincerity of his sentiments arose in her mind, Ernestine made haste to dispel these doubts, without, at the same time, saying

much in praise of Sonnenberg, toward whom her manner, in Dora's presence, was always very cool and reserved.

Thus the latter had no suspicion of the false play of which she was the victim. She saw in Sonnenberg a faithful, disinterested friend, whose sole wish was to serve her.

He had now fallen into the habit of calling on her at least twice a day, in the forenoon and at dusk, and Ernestine, who observed keenly, soon made the discovery that he was always welcome.

He was sitting one evening, at twilight, in Dora's cosy boudoir, while she once more questioned him with regard to the investigation which he still professed to be carrying on.

Sonnenberg shook his head regretfully, and passed his hand slowly over his black beard.

"Unfortunately, I find very little encouragement in my efforts," he said, in a tone of regret. "If I address myself to the authorities, to direct their attention to one or another circumstance, they shrug their shoulders and regret that they cannot enter into my ideas. The fact is that every one feels thoroughly convinced of Dornberg's guilt, and all the more so since, as is said, it has been ascertained that he was, in secret, a passionate lover of play."

"So they accuse him of that, too?" asked Dora, ironically. "I never discovered that passion in him."

"I merely repeat what has been told me, madam," he replied, calmly. "I myself have no means of judging of the matter. It is true, however, that he made that loan of Goldmann in order to pay a debt of honor with it, and such debts of honor are generally gambling debts. But, as I said before, I cannot judge of the matter, nor do I wish to do so; only it is unfortunate

for him that all these circumstances are entered on the minutes."

Dora sat by the window in her rocking-chair, looking thoughtfully out into the twilight, which cast a rosy reflection on her fair face.

"He will be convicted if the real thief is not discovered," she said.

"Every wrong deed must be followed by its punishment," remarked Ernestine in her cool, measured manner. "I have never doubted Dornberg's guilt, and I cannot understand how you can still do so, Dora. You really ought to cast him off entirely now, so that the world may at last know what to think of you. You cannot stop half way. Do not people talk about Frau Winkler's solitary, secluded life, Herr Sonnenberg?"

"Well, they find it natural that she looks upon the honor of her betrothed as her own," replied he.

"I think they must know that Gustav Dornberg is no longer my betrothed," said Dora, with some irritation.

"Those who assert that are not believed," observed Sonnenberg, with a shrug of his shoulders. "People ask why you do not appear in public. They think it strange that you do not, even now—"

"What business is it of theirs how I live?" asked Dora, indignantly. "Am I under any obligation to meet them and answer their inquisitive questions?"

"Certainly not," continued Sonnenberg; "but you would put an end to a great deal of gossip if you would appear in public once more and prove to the world that you no longer stand in any relation to the accused. I do not advise this, my dear madam. I merely ask you to consider the matter. You must be aware that society makes demands on us which we cannot afford to ignore altogether."

"You may be right," said Dora, thoughtfully; "and yet I do not feel as if I could make up my mind to it yet."

"All that is needed is a quick resolve. Let me have the honor of escorting you to the opera to-morrow night. 'Lohengrin' is to be given with an excellent cast, and, if I am not mistaken, you are an enthusiastic admirer of Wagner."

"Do you not like him?" asked Dora, rather absently.

"Certainly! I fully share your admiration of his music, and I should be most happy to enjoy it in your company. You would direct my attention to many of its beauties which I might not notice."

A low knock at the door interrupted their conversation. The old servant, in her sullen way, announced Frau Heppner, who entered the room the next moment.

She acknowledged Sonnenberg's polite salutation rather coldly and extended her hand to Dora, who did not appear to be very highly gratified by her call.

"People who want to see you have to go to you, it seems," she said, in a slightly reproachful tone. "You appear to have forgotten where we live."

"I have not been out much lately," replied Dora, "for reasons that you will understand. Take a seat. How are the children?"

"Thank you, they are well," answered Frau Heppner, with a sigh. "If only this heavy burden could be lifted from us! Heinrich is hardly ever at home now; he is busy from morning till night with papa's affairs, which give us great cause for anxiety."

"They will be settled before long!" said Dora, bitterly. "I can only repeat what I have said from the beginning: The authorities have followed a false track, and the money will not be found before they discover the right one."

A scornful smile passed over the square face of the visitor; she cast a quick glance at Sonnenberg, who seemed lost in thought.

"You are quite alone in that opinion," she replied. "There is no doubt that Dornberg is the thief; and as for the money, it is probably hidden in some place where he alone can find it. And when he has finished his term of punishment he will do as all experienced swindlers do—take his money from its hiding-place and go away a rich man."

"You forget, however, my dear madam, that Dornberg can hardly be counted an experienced swindler," remarked Sonnenberg, in his quiet manner, and this defense earned for him a warm, grateful glance from Dora's eyes.

"I rather think the least experienced of them would be shrewd enough to make sure of his booty," continued Frau Heppner. "I don't believe in the destruction of the bank-notes; Dornberg knew the value of the bank-notes too well to commit such a folly. And Doctor Kerner, who is said to be his counsel, as I hear, will not clear him either, for the whole town condemns him, and the voice of the people is the voice of God. Papa and mamma are quite crushed. Mamma feels so lonely and sad at the villa, and papa goes about in utter despair; every day shows him more clearly that he cannot save himself from this shipwreck. And we are at a loss to comprehend, Dora, how you can take Dornberg's part in spite of everything. All our friends blame you very much for it."

"I cannot help it," replied Dora, scornfully. "No one will convince me that Dornberg is a criminal."

"I suppose not even his conviction would do that?"

"I do not believe that the jury will convict him."

"No one doubts it but you."

"Excuse me, madam, I too have my doubts about it yet," said Sonnenberg. "But in other respects I agree with you. Frau Winkler ought not to provoke harsh judgments by keeping herself so secluded. I requested her, a while ago, to give me the honor of her company to the theater, and I beg of you to assist me."

"Oh, yes, that would be the best and simplest way of convincing people that all is over between you and Dornberg," exclaimed Frau Heppner, vivaciously, and her gray eyes fixed themselves upon Dora's thoughtful face. "We should be very grateful to you if you were to take such a step."

"Well, then, I will accept your kind offer," said Dora, turning to Sonnenburg, and a gracious smile lit up her features as he raised her hand to his lips. "I will prove to society that I have not become a misanthrope, and they can draw whatever conclusions they like from that."

"And they will draw them, I can assure you," said her sister-in-law. "The eyes of all are turned upon you. Every one thinks you still engaged to that thief, and, of course, they will change their opinion if they see you at the theater once more. I am so glad, Herr Sonnenberg, that you have brought this about."

After a few more words Frau Heppner took her leave, expressing the hope that, now that the ice was broken, they might soon have the pleasure of seeing Dora in the family circle again.

"A disagreeable woman," said Dora, after she had left the room. "I have an antipathy against the whole Roland family, which I cannot overcome. It may be a prejudice."

"It is probably more than that," replied Sonnenberg. "I do not feel drawn to these people, either."

"They behaved shamefully during the short time of

my engagement. I can never forgive them for that. By the way, Herr Sonnenberg, have you not yet learned who discovered Dornberg's promissory note at Goldmann's? My brother always evades answering this question if I ask it of him, and I don't care to inqure of the money-lender himself."

"The answer is not hard to find. Goldmann, probably, considered it doubtful whether Dornberg would ever be so situated as to be able to pay his debt, and so the most natural thing for him to do was to question Roland with regard to the matter. He was, of course, obliged to give a reason for such an inquiry, and in that way Roland would, of course, learn the existence of the promissory note."

"That is quite possible," rejoined Dora. "That discovery was grist to their mill; they knew that the wording of the note would rouse my indignation. I shall never forget that the friends of that family can never be my friends."

"You alarm me, dear Frau Winkler. Under these circumstances, I shall, of course, break off all intercourse with the Rolands."

"No, indeed, that would be asking too much. Social forms may be kept up even with those whom we cannot call our friends."

Sonnenberg had risen.

"I value your friendship too highly not to be willing to make any sacrifice to retain it," he said with much warmth.

"No, no, you will not forfeit it by visiting the Rolands," she exclaimed earnestly; "on the contrary, I wish you to continue your intercourse with them, for it is quite possible that some discovery may be arrived at in that way which would be of great importance to me."

"Your wishes are commands for me," said he, with a low bow; "you may rest assured that I shall continue my investigations with untiring perseverance. Your most obedient servant!"

"You must permit me to accompany you to the hall-door," remarked Ernestine. "The servant went out a while ago and has not yet returned."

Sonnenberg bowed silently and they left the boudoir, the door of which Ernestine closed behind her noiselessly.

"That is an important step forward," she whispered, triumphantly; "her consenting to show herself in public in your company. Was Frau Heppner's call agreed upon beforehand?"

"Yes, indeed," he replied, as they slowly approached the hall-door. "Frau Roland intended to come herself at first, but I advised her against it."

"It was certainly better so; now that the ice is once broken, you will progress rapidly."

"The goal is very far off yet."

"That depends upon how soon the verdict is given."

"The case is to come up at the next term of the court, which will be held in a few weeks."

"So much the better. After Dornberg is convicted, Dora will no longer doubt, and will try to forget the whole unpleasant matter. And then we will make her comprehend that only a new engagement will silence the gossip that is circulated about her. The engagement must be followed as soon as possible by marriage, and that by our departure from here!"

"Yes, yes," he replied, and from his eyes there flashed the consuming fire of the passions which were raging within him; "your plan is an excellent one, only we have not quite reached that point yet."

"Do you still doubt that we shall do so?"

"Well, we might yet meet with obstacles of which we have not even a suspicion at present. And later on—"

"Don't trouble yourself unnecessarily. I see no obstacles. Dora is in love with you now. I can gather that from all that she says about you. And later on she will find herself face to face with an accomplished fact, which cannot be altered. Besides, she is easy to lead; you need only take a firm hold of her. So do not lose courage, Theo. We will gain our end, you may depend upon it."

He nodded and left her. Once in the street, he put his eyeglass on his nose and buttoned up his overcoat. He went on slowly, now and then glancing at the brilliantly lit shop-windows, till he reached a restaurant, where he drank a bottle of wine and ate a hearty supper.

It was not late when he had finished that agreeable occupation; and, as he saw no familiar face among the guests, he resolved to go to the Casino and try a game of cards.

But as, while paying his bill at the restaurant, he made the discovery that his pocketbook was quite empty, he found himself obliged to stop at his lodgings, in order to replenish it.

He did not need to go out of his way to do so, as his rooms were quite near the Casino, in a street which was but little frequented and inhabited by none but wealthy people.

His lodgings consisted of three very elegantly furnished rooms, which he hired in the house of a commercial councillor, and for which he paid a very high rent.

The maid-servant met him on the stairs as he was mounting them. Evading, with a coquettish smile, his

bold attempt to pinch her rosy cheeks, she remarked that a lady, closely veiled, had inquired for him shortly before.

This information seemed to surprise him unpleasantly. He had an indistinct recollection of having met a lady just before he reached the house, but had not noticed her. However, he did not trouble himself much about the matter.

He went into his sitting-room and lit his lamp. Then he took off his hat and overcoat, and, humming an opera air, went to his writing-desk to take out his cash-box.

He was still engaged in this way when he heard a slight noise behind him. He turned hastily and his eyes fell upon a lady, young and slender, who was slowly lifting the veil that was attached to her simple gray travelling-hat.

She wore a gray dress, plain and practical, like those common among travelling Englishwomen, and the inference that she was a daughter of Albion was confirmed by her pale, sharp-featured face, which could by no means be called pretty, and her very light hair, smoothly parted over her broad, high forehead.

The two stood for quite a while, silently gazing at each other. Sonnenberg's distorted features expressed the deepest dismay, while triumphant satisfaction was depicted in the thin face of the young woman.

"You here, Mary?" he asked at length, in a hoarse voice.

"You did not expect me, I suppose," she replied, fixing her large, light-blue eyes upon him with a penetrating look.

He passed quickly by her, locked the door and pointed to an arm-chair, in which, after a moment's hesitation, she seated herself.

"What does this mean?" he asked harshly. "Why have you come here?"

"To look for you," she replied, laconically, without averting the gaze with which she closely watched his every movement.

He turned his eyes nervously to the door as if he feared that their conversation might be overheard; but as it was carried on in English, he soon realized that such apprehensions were groundless.

"To look for me?" he repeated, with a sneer. "Am I your slave that I am obliged to do your bidding? You know that I undertook this journey in order to acquire a fortune, and now you run after me—"

"Stop!" she interrupted. "When you started on your journey you expressed the intention of returning in three months at the most. You told me that a distant relation of yours had died intestate, and that you were obliged to be on the spot in person, so as to present your claims to the inheritance. You promised to write every week, and to send me the money necessary for my support. And how have you kept these promises, John Brighton? For the past eight months I have received neither a line nor a shilling from you, and in all that time I have not even known your whereabouts. The letters that I wrote you were returned to me because you could not be found, and of you I heard and saw nothing. What was I to think of that?"

"Nothing," he replied sharply. "I would have returned to London and to you in the course of this month. If the letters that I wrote you did not reach you it was not my fault; you probably changed your quarters and the postman could not find you."

"Ah, you are quite right in thinking that poverty forced me to change my lodgings," she continued, while her eyes wandered around the elegant apartment;

"that was such a matter, of course, that you might feel sure of it. I was obliged to sell one piece of furniture after another, and finally content myself with a miserable garret; but in spite of all that your letters would have reached me if you had written them—I had taken care that they should."

"I can say nothing more than that I did write to you," he replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, having fully regained his composure. "I could not send you money, as I had none myself. We are all obliged to adapt ourselves to circumstances, and, as your husband, I had a right to expect you to trust me."

"I curse the hour in which I ever did so!" she interrupted him, passionately. "If I had stayed at home, I should have been spared all that I have been through since."

"Nothing prevents you from going back there."

"Nothing? I am not the meek creature who can beg for forgiveness on her knees, and you know very well that that is what I should have to do, besides humbling myself to the utmost in other ways, before the doors of my father's house would be opened to me again. I curse myself that I ever believed you. And I call down a thousand curses on your head for having led me astray. It was you who caused me to commit a crime."

"Pshaw, don't be so tragic about it! Your pig-headed father wouldn't consent to our marriage, so what was left us but to elope and get married secretly?"

"He might have forgiven us that, but the money which you forced me to take from his strong-box—"

"You took nothing but what was your own! At that time you admitted that yourself, Mary. Why do you bring it up again now? I had the honest intention to

give you a life free from care, but you know yourself that all my attempts failed. We spent our money and—"

"You were never anything but an adventurer," she again broke in. "You never had that honest purpose; you did not think of me. Oh, why did I not realize that until it was too late! The death of your relative was merely a subterfuge. You wanted to leave me forever, and that is still your intention. I had become quite accustomed to the idea of never seeing you again, when, by chance, I met your friend, James Harris. He told me that he had seen you here, and that, under the name of Sonnenberg, you were playing the part of a rich gentleman."

"I don't remember ever meeting him here," he replied, with a keen glance at his wife, who once more scanned the luxurious appointments of the room with a contemptuous look. "If I had seen him, I should have given him the necessary explanations in a satisfactory manner. I am forced by circumstances to play this part here under an assumed name. In a short time I hope to be a wealthy man, and then you shall be richly compensated for all the privations you have endured."

"I know what to expect from your promises," she retorted. "They have not the least value for me. And it is perfectly indifferent to me whether you met your friend here or not. He saw you and recognized you. That was enough to induce me to start on my journey hither at once. I still possessed a few pieces of jewelry of little value. The money I received for them just sufficed to pay my travelling expenses, and henceforward you will have to take care of me."

Sonnenberg had started from his chair; he measured the room several times with long strides.

"It was an unheard-of folly," he said, after a pause.

"Your presence here may spoil everything for me. Good heavens, I was not working here for myself alone but for you as well! I was looking forward with delight to seeing you happy, and now you have come here to cross all my plans!"

A bitter smile passed over her icy features; her large eyes were again fixed upon him full of contempt.

"Why did your plans have to be kept secret from me if you really had the intention of securing my happiness by them? You say you had no money. Where did you get the means of playing the rich gentleman here? This elegant furniture—"

"Pshaw! That is all pretense, nothing else," he interrupted her. "Not a penny has been paid on it; it is all borrowed. I have to play my part to gain my end."

"Then that end is a dishonorable one?"

"It will make us rich. What more would you have?"

"I would not care to become rich through a crime."

"Who is talking about that?" he cried roughly. "I expect to acquire that wealth in a perfectly honest way, but you must give me time until the fruit which I want to pluck is ripe."

"And when will that be?"

"In a few weeks. Where are you staying?"

"At the Black Eagle."

"A third-class hotel," he said, stopping and directing a keen glance at the young woman through his eyeglass. "When did you arrive?"

"This afternoon."

"And you found my lodgings so quickly? Of whom did you inquire about them?"

"Mr. Harris had written down your address for me, so I merely had to inquire for the street. The number I could find myself. I was here once before, a while

ago, and was told that you had not yet come in. So I concluded to wait for you outside."

"Then you did not mention my name to any one?" he asked, with apparent indifference, although the expression of his face betrayed the feverish suspense with which he awaited the answer to his question.

"No; the name of John Brighton is not known here. Which is your real name?"

"You have just spoken it."

"Truly?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"I was just wondering whether I would really be your wife if you had married me under a false name."

"Nonsense!" he cried, as he continued his walk.

"If that should be the case—and I shall soon find out whether it is—I shall not hesitate to go to the police and have you arrested," she continued, in a resolute tone. "You need not hope that I should forgive you any such deception. I should follow you to the ends of the earth to revenge myself for it, and should not rest till you met your reward in the penitentiary, you may depend upon it."

At this Sonnenberg gave a start. He hastily turned his back on her and stepped to the window.

"I tell you once more your idea is absurd," he replied. "What reason should I have had for deceiving you? Listen to reason, Mary, and have patience a while longer; all will come right in the end. Go back to London and wait for me there; I will follow you in a few weeks."

"I prefer to stay here until we can make the journey together," she replied, brusquely.

"But I cannot accommodate you here at all."

"Then I shall remain at the hotel."

Sonnenberg stamped his foot angrily.

"Do you want to spoil everything?" he exclaimed in an exasperated tone.

"Are you afraid to acknowledge that you have a wife?" she replied, looking at him scornfully. "Have you, perhaps, cast your eyes on some rich lady whom you can swindle out of her property by marrying her?"

"Be quiet!" he shouted furiously.

"No, I will not be quiet; I am not under obligations to be so! Am I right in my conjectures? Take care, John. This affair may be your ruin! I can forgive a great deal, but such a deception as that I could never forgive!"

He bit his lip to suppress the cry of rage which was about to escape him. He felt that he must control himself, if he would not betray everything to the keenly observing eyes of this energetic woman.

He had forgotten her or, at least, had not longer believed that she would find him out and develop so much energy; now she threatened to overthrow all his plans.

"You are utterly mistaken, Mary," he said, after having composed himself with difficulty. "Your suppositions are entirely groundless. I have no idea of deceiving you. Trust in me. I cannot communicate my plans to you. I have no right to do so. Go home without fear—"

"Don't trouble yourself. I shall stay here! If I cannot live here with you you will give me the money to stay at the hotel. If it should be unpleasant to you to have to acknowledge me as your wife here we can leave to-morrow."

"And what would await us over yonder?" asked Sonnenberg, with a sneer. "Nothing but the old misery."

"You can work."

"You know how many vain attempts I made at that time to find something to do."

"No matter, you will go back with me," she replied, very decidedly; "I shall not loose my hold of you again. I owe it to my honor to return to London in your company."

"Good God, what folly!"

"Call it what you will, I am fully resolved. And I have no doubt that I shall discover the plans that you are pursuing here. If their aim is an evil one, do not hope that I shall approve of them. The love that once bound me to you and led me to commit follies for your sake is dead. I advise you not to arouse my hatred—it would destroy you without mercy."

Theodor Sonnenberg still stood by the window, staring fixedly out into the darkness. His pulses throbbed feverishly, the blood rushed hotly to his forehead and cheeks, but in spite of the terrible excitement under which he was laboring he did not forget that he must remain master of himself.

"So you will not do as I wish you to?" he asked hoarsely.

"Did you pay any regard to my wishes," she replied, coldly. "Did you give me the love and care of a husband?"

"You will repent in future—"

"That I allowed myself to be deluded by you? I have repented of that long ago, and that repentance has cost me many a sleepless night and many a sorrowful day."

"If that is the truth," he replied, "I should think you yourself would wish for a final separation."

"I am ready for it, but only if it is brought about in a legal way. We will get a divorce in London, but before that I want to have it made known here that

you are married. I will not permit you to deceive another woman as long as I am your wife; and even though, in this conflict with me, you should become as wretched as it is possible for a man to be, I shall not strike arms until the law has loosed the chains that bind us to one another."

Again he stamped his foot angrily. He stepped quickly up to the table at which Mary was sitting. His eyes were turned upon her with a look of fiercest hate.

"After those words the possibility of a peaceful relation between us is out of the question," he said, in a trembling voice. "You will not hear reason, and I cannot force you to believe my words. Very well, then; what do you wish me to do?"

"To go with me to London. The rest can be settled there."

"You spoke of a divorce."

"We will talk about that when we are over there."

"Very well. When will we start?"

"To-morrow."

"I cannot leave this place at such short notice without destroying all my bridges behind me," he replied, in his turn assuming a resolute tone. "Your obstinacy shall not force me to renounce the fruits of all my efforts; and when we are once divorced, my further plans can have no interest for you. You will, therefore, have to give me a little more time."

"Will you pay my bill at the hotel?"

He went to his writing-desk and took from his cash-box several bank-bills, which he laid upon the table.

"I demand one condition of you which I expect you to fulfill," he said, emphatically. "We will leave as soon as possible, but while you are here I do not wish you either to let any one know our relation to each

other or to make any inquiries with regard to me. Will you promise me that?"

"Did you ever show any consideration for my wishes?" asked his wife, in a similar tone.

"I ask you if you will fulfill that condition?"

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then I shall cast loose from you without a legal separation, and shall find means to force you to leave this place."

"I am not afraid of your threats; the British ambassador will protect me from you."

"So you defy me?" cried Sonnenberg, furiously.

"I should do so without fear if my interests demanded it. I will give the promise you require. I agree to keep silent until to-morrow night, but I will not bind myself for longer."

"'Till to-morrow night!" he repeated, fetching a deep breath. "Till then you will remain at your hotel and ask no one anything about me. Don't misunderstand me, Mary. Don't think that I am ashamed of you, or that I am forced to disown you; I demand your silence merely because—"

"No matter what reasons you have for demanding it," she interrupted him, contemptuously, as she rose; "I will give you the time you ask so that you can recall your former promises. If there is a spark of honor and of shame left in you the memory of them will fill you with self-contempt. To-morrow evening, then, John—no later: Day after to-morrow I shall begin to fight, and after that you need expect no more mercy from me."

He shrugged his shoulders as if to say that he did not fear that fight, in which he hoped to be the victor; but the subdued fire in his eyes and the twitching of his lips gave the lie to such apparent indifference.

"And where shall we meet to-morrow night?" he asked.

"You can come to the Black Eagle, if you like."

"No, I do not wish to do that."

"Then write me your intentions."

"I have no time for that; such a matter cannot be fully explained in writing."

"Then I 'll come to you," said Mary, resolutely; "tell me at what time."

"I cannot be at your disposal till after the theatre," he replied, hesitating. "I have promised to go there to-morrow evening and cannot cancel the engagement."

"Nothing would be easier, if you wished to do so. An indisposition—"

"Well, then, I do not wish to, either. Let us extend the truce till the night after to-morrow."

"You have heard my decision," she replied coldly, as she dropped her veil. "I will not yield a single point; I cannot, if I would protect myself from being cheated. To-morrow night we must decide definitely when we will leave this place. The rest, as I said before, we can settle after we reach London. And day after to-morrow I shall make inquiries as to what is your real name. I intend to know everything now."

"What can you learn here?" he asked sneeringly. "This is not my home. I am a stranger here like yourself. I give you fair warning, Mary. Do not provoke me beyond endurance. You might repent of it bitterly."

A short and contemptuous laugh was her only answer.

"Expect me here to-morrow night," she said, in a tone which admitted of no contradiction. "No matter how late it may be, I shall come. An unfortunate woman in my position has no reason to fear anything."

"But alone in the street, so late at night."

"Bah! I shall not be at a loss for an answer if any one speaks to me, and if the worst comes to the worst,

I have a revolver with me. Stay where you are; I do not wish your escort," she continued, as she saw that he was about to take his hat. "I shall find my way to the hotel. Don't forget my words, John, and don't think that I am a weak, vacillating woman, who can be won over again by smooth words. My resolve is taken. Nothing can change it."

She had opened the door while speaking the last words, and he made no attempt to retain her as she passed out.

He stared fixedly at the door behind which she had disappeared. He heard her light step on the stairs and listened, with head bent forward, for the closing of the house-door.

"Devil!" he muttered, with a deep breath, passing his hand slowly over his brow and eyes. "Am I to renounce everything for her sake, to allow myself to be harnessed once more to the old, heavy yoke? Am I obliged to obey the will of that scarecrow? Bah! If I wanted to, I could—but no, she would raise a disturbance, and then all would, indeed, be lost for me!"

He crossed his hands behind him and paced to and fro for a long time; at last he stopped before the sideboard and took a bottle from it.

He hastily drank a glass of the strong brandy which it contained, and then gazed fixedly before him for a while.

"Who would have thought of her?" he said, gnashing his teeth. "I had fully expected that she would return to her father at Southampton and forget her faithless husband, and now she suddenly hangs herself at my heels like a leaden weight! The devil take her! If Ernestine— Pshaw, we must bring the matter to an end in one way or another, and Dora must not hear about it!"

He carried the bottle and the glass to the table and drank once more; then he seated himself, leaned his head upon his hands and remained lost in thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROMISSORY NOTE.

Tastefully dressed, Dora was awaiting Sonnenberg's arrival in order to go to the opera under his escort.

Her white opera-cloak and her fan lay ready on a chair. Ernestine was occupied in perfuming her white kid-gloves.

Ernestine herself was plainly dressed in black silk, with only a narrow lace ruffle around her neck and her long, thin wrists, and a crimson rose in her hair was the ohly ornament which she wore.

There was yet an hour's time, but Dora had intentionally completed her toilet so early, because she expected Sonnenberg to make his appearance, as usual, at twilight to have a cosy chat with her.

Although she would not acknowledge it, this hour of friendly intercourse had, by this time, become almost a necessity for her. Sonnenberg had been most successful in gaining her favor and confidence.

But on this occasion Dora waited in vain, and, by degrees, this annoyed and irritated her.

Ernestine observed this with increasing satisfaction, although she pretended to have no suspicion of the cause of Dora's ill-humor.

"You will have many an opera-glass directed toward you to-night," she observed. "It is well that people will at last see that you have given up Dornberg, and it would be better still if you would at once put an end to all possible future doubts."

"And how could I do that?" inquired Dora, with a constrained smile.

"Only by your speedy engagement to another."

Dora's brown eyes flashed angrily. She raised herself from a careless posture and looked fixedly at her companion.

"Do you, perhaps, also wish to make a proposition with regard to the gentleman whom I am to choose?" she asked, sarcastically.

"Oh no, indeed, not by any means," replied Ernestine. "I should never presume to advise you on that subject. I merely expressed an opinion. Whether you agree with that opinion or not is quite another question."

"Never!"

"Well, then, that ends the matter. No, Dora, I shall never offer you any such advice. My own experience of married life would forbid my doing so. Often have I called down the judgment of heaven upon those who persuaded me to make that unhappy marriage, and I am quite sure that the same has been the case with you. I only meant that such an engagement would be the best way of proving to the world that you wished to have nothing more to do with that misguided man."

"I must request you never to repeat that proposition to me," said Dora, in a trembling voice and with a stern look. "I have loved but once in my life, and I love Gustav still, in spite of his errors. I thought I loved my first husband when I was sold to him, but at that time I did not know what true love was. My heart

awakened to it only when I met Gustav. And, say what you will—judge him as severely as you like—I shall never forget him and never believe in this terrible accusation which is resting upon him."

"That feeling does great credit to your heart," replied Ernestine, with imperturbable composure, "but the verdict of the court will give the lie to your opinion after all. If my testimony is required I shall not be able to conceal the fact that Herr Dornberg was very much excited that last evening, and that he smelt strongly of liquor. If I take an oath I shall be obliged to tell the whole truth."

"Am I asking you to perjure yourself?"

"Oh, no, you are too noble-minded for that. I only wish to remind you of his behavior on that occasion; his rage at your having discovered his secret doings and his coarse invectives against me as well as against your connections. If Herr Sonnenberg had witnessed that outburst he would never have defended him; and, indeed, I think it very strange that he still takes his part."

"Why? Is your hatred of that unhappy man so deep that only his conviction can satisfy it?"

"Certainly not, Dora; I do not hate him—contempt has no room for hatred, you know. But it makes me indignant that Sonnenberg continues to uphold you in your faith in his innocence; you will never have peace in that way."

Dora seemed about to give a testy answer, but she was prevented from doing so by the entrance of the servant, who handed her a card.

"Colonel von Wartenfels requests a private interview," she read; then, turning to the maid, she continued: "I shall be happy to see the colonel, and will join him in a few minutes."

"A private interview?" asked Ernestine, in surprise. "What does he want, I wonder? Be careful, Dora; the colonel will be sure to take the part of his foster-son, and will probably blame you. If he says an angry word to you, or annoys you in any way, just ring the bell and I will be with you at once."

"You heard that he asks for a private interview," said Dora, coldly. "You will therefore be so good as to see that we are not interrupted."

With this she left the room and in a moment stood before the chivalrous figure of the old soldier, who raised the hand which she extended to him to his lips.

"Excuse the question, my dear madam," he said, "but for certain reasons I am obliged to ask it. May I be sure that our conversation cannot be overheard here?"

Dora cast a quick look at the two doors and then led the way to a window, where, behind a small stand with exotics, stood several arm-chairs.

"I know through Franciska that you do not believe in Gustav's guilt," said the colonel, when he had seated himself, "and I need hardly assure you, I suppose, that I and my family do not believe in it either."

"There are others, too, who defend him," she remarked.

"Yes, Sonnenberg, I know; but I have my reasons for having even stronger doubts of that man's sincerity than of Gustav's guilt. We will come back to that, however," continued the old gentleman, taking a wallet from his pocket. "First, we will attend to more pressing matters. You felt yourself obliged to break your engagement with Gustav on account of a promissory note made out by him, and with regard to which he refused to give you any information."

"He declared that he had pledged his word of honor not to do so."

"That was very honorable of him, madam! You would not believe him—"

"I felt outraged by the wording of the note."

"Probably because you thought he had given that note in payment of some gambling debt?"

"Yes, that is what I believed; and the passionate vehemence with which Gustav denied it only served to confirm me in that belief."

"You were probably likewise confirmed in it by other persons, who bore Gustav ill will," remarked the colonel. "Well, appearances were certainly against him, and in fact no one but he and one other knew what had prompted him, or rather obliged him, to give the note. Even Goldmann was in ignorance of it, although the scoundrel forced him to pledge your name as security for the debt. I only learned this a few days ago, and would have come to you at once if I could have handed you the money. May I ask you for the note now?"

The old gentleman's words had completely confused Dora; she did not understand them at once.

"I have destroyed it," she replied.

"Heavens, you ought not to have done that, madam!"

"As I paid the amount, the note was mine."

"By no means, for it was not Dornberg who had to repay that loan, but my son."

"Your son?"

"To be sure; but I forgot that you know nothing about that. My son was in great trouble on that day. For the first, and I am quite sure for the last, time in his life, he had been induced to gamble, and he did not dare confess his fault to me. If he had not paid that debt of honor by a certain time, he would have been

obliged to resign, and if he had gone to a money-lender he would have had to submit to conditions which might have poisoned his whole life. In his distress he applied to Gustav, and the noble fellow helped him and pledged his word that neither I nor any one should ever learn anything about the matter."

"Oh, that alters everything!" cried Dora, with a long sigh of relief.

"He would certainly not have pledged your name if Goldmann had not made his doing so a condition, and you are now aware that he did not do it frivolously, but from unselfish friendship."

"I repeat that alters everything!" replied Dora, holding her hand to her heart, while a smile lit up her face like sunshine. "If I had only had a suspicion of this, matters would never have gone so far!"

"He was pledged to secrecy, remember, and even my son did not learn the terms of the note. Now you know the truth, my dear madam, and here is the money."

Dora made a motion as if she would reject the bills which he handed her, but his grave, firm look convinced her that she would offend him deeply by so doing; she, therefore, took the money without a word.

"You will understand that both I and my son naturally wish to to have this matter treated with the greatest discretion," resumed the colonel, pulling at his long mustache. "And we are particularly desirous of such secrecy for reasons which I am not at liberty to tell you just now. But if the clearing of Gustav's honor should demand an explanation, we are, of course, willing to give it."

"Would not Gustav's counsel be the best person to decide about that?" asked Dora.

"You are right; and, as Doctor Kerner has my fullest

confidence, we will leave it to his judgment. But may I ask you, dear madam, not to mention the subject to any one else?"

"Not even to Fannie?"

"Oh, yes; Fannie is in the secret. I referred particularly to the persons whom you see most frequently"

"And whom you do not trust?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, you may be right as far as Ernestine is concerned. She seems to have taken a dislike to my poor friend, and my brother and his family, too, would hardly rejoice in this disclosure. But Herr Sonnenberg is Gustav's zealous defender. He is taking all possible pains to discover the real culprit."

"Do you think so?" asked the colonel, rather sarcastically. "I do not. To me his actions seem only a mask intended to deceive you. I went to Goldmann to tell him to his face that he was a scoundrel, because he had broken his word and shown the note. Well, a true scoundrel will betray even a friend without a spark of shame, and so Goldmann betrayed to me that Sonnenberg had been the first to discover that promissory note."

Dora stared at the old gentleman in dismay. She was not prepared for this disclosure, but she at once recognized its bearing.

"Goldmann told you that?" she said in astonishment. "Sonnenberg was the traitor? Then, indeed, the mask he is wearing now is a boundless effrontery."

"Which, doubtless, has certain aims in view," replied the colonel gravely. "By pretending to be carrying on investigations himself, he may wish to prevent your making inquiries, and it is not impossible that he fears those inquiries on his own account."

"You don't suppose that he himself—" said Dora, in

a low tone, casting a cautious glance at the door, behind which Sonnenberg's voice was just then heard. "If there were any foundation for that suspicion—"

"We shall have to drop the matter now, for we cannot exhaust it in a few words," the old gentleman interrupted her. "And, moreover, I see that you are going out."

"Yes, to the opera; but I would gladly give it up."

"Herr Sonnenberg is going with you?"

"He asked my permission to do so yesterday, and I consented."

"Then you must not withdraw, of course. He would blame me for it, and at once suspect that I had warned you against him. A quarrel with him would hardly be for Gustav's interest."

"Do you fear him?"

"Certainly not, my dear madam. But as long as we have no proofs against him, we ought not to give words to any suspicion. I cannot tell what you think of Gustav now, or how you judge him, for you would still be justified in blaming him for pledging your name; but you might do him an important service by observing Sonnenberg closely. Fannie suspects the latter to be in league with your companion. She thinks she has proofs of it. You may draw your own conclusions from this supposition."

"I can hardly believe that," replied Dora. "Ernestine's manner toward him is always cold and distant."

"That may be a mask, too. In my opinion, Sonnenberg is an adventurer. You must talk it over with Fannie. She would have been here long ago, but I asked her to wait until I had settled this matter of the note."

"It would be better for me to go to her," replied Dora. "At your house we can talk without fear of

interruption, and if your suspicions are correct Ernestine ought to remain in ignorance of our interview."

"That will be better, indeed. When may we expect you?"

"To-morrow, at eleven."

"Very well. I will not keep you any longer, now. Then I may rely on your discretion!"

"Quite as much as on my gratitude!"

"Oblige me by guarding not only your speech, but also your looks, my dear madam. Those people will try hard to discover what I have been telling you. A bad conscience is never at rest—it scents danger everywhere."

"Don't be afraid," she answered, while another sunny smile passed over her face. "I can do or be anything for the sake of him who is dearer to me than all the world beside, now that I know how noble he is. I am sure he would willingly make as great a sacrifice for me as he made for his friend."

"You may rely upon that; Gustav is incapable of any low action. The deuce! Excuse me, I am an old soldier—if I knew who had cast this blot on his honest name, I would—but I trust in God, and believe that He will bring the truth to light."

"That is my earnest hope," replied Dora, gravely.

With this the old gentleman took his leave.

Dora closed the door after him; then she turned and clasped her hands.

"Thank God," she said, softly, "that burden is taken from me! I could shout for joy that I am free to love him once more. But I must be wary. My task now is to ensnare those hypocrites in their own nets. I know how I'll do it: I'll throw out the bait. I wonder if they will bite!"

She surveyed herself in the mirror, hastily giving a

last touch to her toilet and went to the boudoir, where Sonnenberg and Ernestine where awaiting her.

With her eyes sharpened by the colonel's warning, it did not escape her notice that, as she entered the room, Sonnenberg started slightly and Ernestine turned hastily away. There was no doubt in her mind that a confidential conversation had been carried on here in her absence.

Sonnenberg, however, was in no wise disconcerted; he came to meet her with a bow, and asked, in an interested tone:

"I suppose the colonel brought you some good news?"

At the same time Ernestine stole a glance at Dora's slightly flushed face.

"You are right!" replied the latter. "The colonel thinks he has found traces which, if followed up, will lead to the discovery of the real thief."

"Indeed? And what are they?"

"Unfortunately he was not at liberty to tell me the particulars," continued Dora, while she furtively watched the expression of Sonnenberg's face, which betrayed neither surprise nor dismay, but only incredulity and indifference. "The colonel seems to look upon his discovery as an important secret as yet."

"He is old, and old people are often very childish in their ideas and their actions," observed Ernestine, with a sneer.

"I do not agree with you entirely in that opinion," said Sonnenberg, thoughtfully. "I think it quite possible that the colonel has made some such discovery."

Was that, too, a feint? Dora watched him closely, but she could find nothing in his face which could lead her to suspect that he did not think as he spoke.

"No idea of it!" cried Ernestine. "It is very natural

that he should think so. Dornberg is his foster-son, and he owes it to his own honor to take his part. But I consider it impossible that others should believe such a thing. There is not a link missing in the chain of evidence on which the accusation against Dornberg is founded. We ought really to drop this subject once and for all, Dora. It only throws you into an excitement which cannot be good for you."

"We cannot control our thoughts," replied Dora. "If Dornberg is innocent, as I firmly believe, he deserves my pity and my cordial sympathy."

"In spite of the promissory note?" asked her companion, ironically.

"Perhaps the colonel has given you some explanation of that matter?" asked Sonnenberg, with apparent indifference.

"If he could have done so he would not have waited until now," replied Dora, in a similar tone. "And if I still cared very much about it I should go to see Herr Goldmann."

"By doing that you would only lower yourself in that fellow's eyes," warned Ernestine.

"And what could he tell you?" added Sonnenberg, looking at his watch. "Nothing but that Dornberg had received the loan and made out the promissory note. But if you wish to hear more about it I shall be happy to call there to-morrow and—"

"Do you know him personally?" Dora quickly interrupted him.

"No, I have not that honor," replied Sonnenberg. "I have no relations with such people."

"Then you would not learn anything from him, either, and I no longer feel any interest in the matter. Whatever he might tell me would not alter the fact that Gustav made out a promissory note like that."

"That he did so," observed Ernestine, "proves that he was not worthy of your love, and you would do best not to think of him any longer."

"Not to think of him?" repeated Dora. "That would be impossible."

"I agree with you," rejoined Sonnenberg; "one cannot forget so quickly. I can understand everything else, but not how Dornberg could prove himself so unworthy of a love which ought to have made him supremely happy."

At that moment the maid announced the carriage.

Sonnenberg hung the opera-cloak over Dora's shoulders, for which service she thanked him with a captivating smile.

Soon after the carriage rolled away with them, and when, a while later, Dora was seated beside Sonnenberg at the opera, she revolved in her mind all that the colonel had communicated to her, as well as the hints which he had thrown out.

Many opera-glasses were directed toward her.

Dora paid no attention to this; she left it to her companion to return all inquiring glances, and Ernestine took pleasure in assuming that duty.

Now and then Sonnenberg would whisper something to his charming neighbor, and it was evident to her that he did so merely to exhibit, to those who cared to see, his intimate relations with her.

She no longer suffered herself to be deceived. Her suspicions were awakened, and Sonnenberg now appeared to her, too, in the light of a fortune-hunter who was endeavoring to step into Dornberg's place.

He had denied his acquaintance with Goldmann without hesitation. That was a lie; and that lie could only serve to confirm the colonel's surmises.

What if those surmises were correct! But was it

possible or even conceivable that Sonnenberg had committed that robbery? She once more recalled to memory all that she had heard on the subject.

Sonnenberg was at the Rolands' that evening. He had been seized with the nosebleed and had left the room. Every one thought he had gone home, when he suddenly reappeared just after the discovery of the theft.

Strange that the examining magistrate had attached no importance to this—indeed, had paid no attention to it.

Where had Sonnenberg been in the interval? Had he really had the nosebleed? Or had that, too, been a lie?

Dora resolved to question Clement, the janitor, who knew all the circumstances.

And how about the understanding between Ernestine and Sonnenberg, of which Fannie said she had proofs?

Well, Dora herself had seen enough this very evening to make her suspect a confidential relation between them; and, if such a league existed, then Ernestine, too, was an impostor and no longer worthy of her trust.

She took up her opera-glass mechanically and turned it upon a lady dressed in gray, who sat in a third-tier box opposite her, and who, since the commencement of the performance, had been gazing at her so fixedly that it could not fail to attract attention.

The music ceased, the act was at an end. Dora lowered her glass.

"Do you know that lady in gray up there?" she asked Sonnenberg, who was offering her a *bonbonnière*.

He took her glass and turned it in the direction indicated.

"I have not the pleasure," he replied rather coldly.

"Some dressmaker, probably, who has worked for you, and whom you have forgotten."

"I think not. She seems to be a stranger, an Englishwoman."

"Possibly!" replied Sonnenberg, facetiously. "And in that case your beauty is probably the magnet that attracts her eyes to you."

"Are you a flatterer, too?" she asked in the same tone, helping herself to a *bonbon*. "I was not aware of that!"

"You are mistaken, my dear madam; I only speak the truth."

"You are, indeed, looking very handsome to-night," whispered Ernestine, who sat behind them.

"Thanks!" replied Dora, indifferently. "I can't understand why that lady should stare at me so incessantly."

"Unfortunately we cannot forbid her being so rude," said Sonnenberg, regretfully.

Dora remained silent, but from that time she observed the lady in gray more closely and, as her glass was an excellent one, she soon recognized that hatred, anger and other kindred passions were depicted on that sharp, thin face.

Were they directed toward her or toward her escort? She could not remember ever to have seen the lady; it was, therefore, hardly conceivable that the latter should have any reason to hate her.

And if they were directed toward Sonnenberg, what could be his relations with this stranger?

She conversed with him in order to be able to observe him furtively, but in spite of her watchful glances she could discover nothing which confirmed her suspicions.

Sonnenberg remained calm and perfectly unembar-

rassed. He seemed to be giving his whole attention to the music.

Only once he raised his eyes to the box in which the lady sat, but his glance was cold and indifferent, and the next moment he turned to Dora again with a smile, in order to ask some unimportant question.

But Dora did not allow herself to be deceived as easily as he might have thought. She had no doubt but that she was standing face to face with some dark mystery, which Theodor Sonnenberg either did not wish or did not dare to solve for her.

If she could only speak to that lady! She felt convinced that, in that case, she would gain some information as to Sonnenberg's past life, and most probably learn something which might give a firm foothold to the colonel's suspicion.

Could it be done?

How could she learn the lady's name and address?

Dora thought the matter over quite a while, and at last believed she had found a way of accomplishing her end.

She knew the box-opener personally; all that she needed was an opportunity of saying a few words to her in private.

Her plan was soon matured; she would try it; and should it prove unsuccessful no harm would come of it.

When the curtain dropped after the second act she asked Sonnenberg to take her to the foyer.

Ernestine was about to accompany them, but Dora told her it was unnecessary. She complained of a slight dizziness and took Sonnenberg's arm.

"Pray, allow me to take you to the buffet and offer you a glass of wine," he said, in a sympathizing tone.

"No, I would rather remain here in the corridor,

SONNENBERG SEEMED TO BE GIVING HIS WHOLE ATTENTION.—*See Page* 166.

where it is quiet and cool. I shall feel better in a few minutes. But if I might ask a favor of you—"

She hesitated and gave him a look which made his blood flow faster.

"You will make me happy," he said, "by expressing any wish that I can fulfill."

"Might I trouble you to get me a small glass of claret?"

"With the greatest pleasure. But had I not better call your companion? I shall have to leave you alone—"

"No, no," she hastily interrupted him. "Ernestine's talk would only make me feel worse."

Sonnenberg left her with a bow. Hardly was he out of sight when she quickly approached the box-opener, who was standing near by.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked, softly.

"Certainly, madam," replied the woman. "You may trust me entirely."

"Well, you will be satisfied with your reward in this case. No one must know of the commission which I am about to give you. Do you understand? No one! Opposite our box, in the third tier, there is a lady whose name and address I wish to learn. Do you think you could ascertain them for me?"

"Please describe the lady to me, madam."

"She is young, very thin, with light, reddish hair. She is dressed in gray, with a gray hat and brown veil. One might take her for an Englishwoman."

"That is enough," said the woman, with a nod. "I shall find her. May I tell her that some one wants to know her address?"

"If you cannot obtain it in any other way you may do so; but do not tell her who gave you the order. It is possible that she may make inquiries about me. In

that case I give you permission to mention my name and to answer all her questions truthfully, as far as I am concerned."

"It shall be done as you wish, madam. And when may I bring you my answer to-morrow?"

"Will any hour suit you?"

"I can come at any hour you like."

"Very well, then. I shall expect you about ten o'clock. Here is my handkerchief. You will bring it to me under pretense of having found it in the box. You will ask my maid to announce you to me, and will give the handkerchief to no one but me. If my companion should be present, and I cannot send her away without arousing her suspicions, you will not say a word about my commission. You had, therefore, better pin a paper with the name and address to the handkerchief. Have you understood me?"

"Perfectly," said the box-opener, with a comprehensive smile. "I am quite used to such commissions."

"So much the better," said Dora. "I depend on you."

With this she walked slowly away in the direction from which Sonnenberg would return, and found that she was just in time, for hardly a minute had passed before her escort stood before her, glass in hand.

Dora welcomed him with a smile and slowly drank the wine.

"I am very grateful to you," she said; "that has refreshed me wonderfully. Just give the glass to the box-opener; we will go back now."

They had hardly resumed their seats when the last act began.

Lohengrin sang his farewell-song, to which Sonnenberg seemed to listen with delight, while Dora once more raised her eyes to the third-tier box.

Still that same face, distorted by the conflict of evil

passions! Still that burning look of hate, which rested alternately upon her and upon Sonnenberg.

Involuntarily she thought of the possibility that this person might confront her as she was leaving the theatre, in order to give free vent to the storm raging within her, regardless of consequences.

Who would protect her, in that case, from the hate and fury of this passionate woman?

She had not yet found an answer to this question when the curtain fell.

Sonnenberg escorted her to the cloak-room and placed her wrap on her shoulders, after which they slowly descended the stairs, surrounded by a jostling crowd.

Her fears were not realized; the lady in gray did not appear. Greatly relieved, Dora entered her carriage.

"Will you not ride with us?" she asked, as Sonnenberg closed the door.

"If you wish it," he replied quickly.

"Oh, no; we will excuse you! Till to-morrow, then, and, once more, many thanks. Good-night!"

The horses started; the carriage rolled quickly away.

Sonnenberg stood looking after it for a few moments; then, pulling his hat over his eyes, he followed it, and soon turned into a quieter street.

"So she was there, too!" he said to himself, setting his teeth hard. "Another proof that she is resolved to cross my path and have her will. But I cannot and will not go back. I have a horror of the wretched life I should lead with that woman!"

As if inspired by a sudden resolve, he quickened his pace; and, when he reached the house in which he lived, he stopped.

"She 'll come," he muttered; "I know her. She never forgets."

He walked up and down the street, and once, when the cutting night wind blew sharply in his face, he stopped, stamped his foot angrily, and turned up the collar of his overcoat.

At last he saw her; she came toward him with hasty steps.

"Let us go in," she said, breathlessly. "Some drunken men are following me."

"I will see that they do not molest you."

"And what good will it do if they knock you down; they are insolent fellows, who make no account of a human life."

Sonnenberg hesitated.

It had been his intention to confer with his wife outside, but the loud, coarse voices approaching caused him some uneasiness.

"Come then," he said, testily. "But I must ask you to keep as quiet as possible until we reach my rooms. I have never yet received visitors by night, and would not like to gain the reputation of a *roué*."

He opened the door noiselessly with his nightkey, and, after they had entered it, closed in the same manner.

It was dark in the hall. They remained for a while standing by the door and heard the drunken fellows stagger past outside, swearing and laughing boisterously.

"Give me your hand," he whispered; "I shall have to lead you."

She did as he told her, without hesitation, and he felt her hand, which was as cold as ice, trembling in his own.

A few minutes later they entered his sitting-room. Sonnenberg locked the door and lit the lamp.

Mary had remained standing by the door; now she sank into an armchair, quite exhausted.

"Is this the courage of which you boasted last night?" he asked with a sneer, as he divested himself of his hat and overcoat and took a seat opposite her.

"If I try to get out of the way of a drunken man that does not prove that I have no courage," she replied.

"You carry a pistol?"

"I do, and I should not hesitate for a moment to make use of it if my life were in danger; but as long as I can avoid doing so, I prefer not to avail myself of this last resort."

On the table at which they sat stood a bottle of wine and several glasses. Sonnenberg filled one of the latter and drained it hastily.

"Shall I fill a glass for you too?" he asked.

"From that bottle? You may," she replied, looking at him with flashing eyes.

"A strange answer!" he sneered. "Is your mistrust of me so great that you are afraid of my poisoning you?"

"I consider you capable of anything."

"That is very flattering for me."

"It is the truth. What I have seen to-night at the theatre can only confirm me in my mistrust."

"Really? Well, you saw me in the company of a very handsome woman, that is all," he said, with a contemptuous shrug, while she drank the wine.

Mary set down the glass, and the look which she now fixed upon him was so full of burning hatred that he was startled.

"A young, handsome and rich widow," she replied, in a hissing voice. "They said you were engaged to her."

"A short time ago she was said to be engaged to another."

"Yes; a man who committed a crime and is now in prison. Well, she may see her second *fiancé* in prison,

too. I know your plans now. My suspicions were correct. You intend, by a rich marriage, to secure for yourself the life of ease that you are longing for."

"Nonsense," he replied. "You seem to have met some sewing-woman in your box who entertained you with all sorts of gossip."

"I know perfectly well to whom I applied for information," said she, emphatically. "I repeat that I know your plans; but I also know that you are married, and I shall tell her of it."

"How very amiable of you!" he retorted.

Her eyes flashed, her face darkened with passion.

"I shall do it, in order to cross your fine plans," she said. "You seem to think that when we are once divorced in England you can come back here and win your wealthy bride."

"And if I did think so, why should you object?" he asked. "You wanted a divorce yourself."

"Why should I object? Because you have made me miserable—so miserable that I shall have to bear the burden as long as I live, and because I wish to revenge myself on you for that. I shall call on that lady tomorrow and tell her about your past; she will hear things of which I am quite sure she has no suspicion at present."

"You will simply make yourself ridiculous," replied he, and the calm indifference which he exhibited at the same time did not fail to make an impression on Mary.

"Go to her, if you like, and tell her everything bad you can think of about me; she will listen to you, and ask you, in surprise, what your object is in doing so? She noticed, of course, that you stared at her the whole evening, and expressed the opinion that you were probably not quite right in your mind. Well, your abuse of

me will only confirm her in that opinion! She can attribute it to nothing but jealousy on your part, which would seem all the more ridiculous to her, because there is not the slightest foundation for it."

"As if I had not seen your lover-like glances."

"Oh, of course! Your mistrust and your jealousy could not fail to sharpen your eyes. You may suppose whatever you like, but I give you my word of honor that that lady has no idea of marrying or even of becoming engaged to any one, for she still loves that fellow in prison."

"If that were the case, she would not have gone to the theatre with you."

"You are apparently right there, but only apparently! I do not deny that I am on friendly terms with the lady and her connections, and what right have you to reproach me for accompanying a lady who is a friend of mine to the theatre and conversing with her? If I had thought that I was wronging you by so doing I should have avoided it, for I could suppose that you would be at the theatre this evening for the purpose of watching my movements. I had told you that I was going there. And now enough has been said about this childish nonsense. We will start for London to-morrow."

"I shall go the day after," replied Mary, resolutely.

Sonnenberg had refilled the glasses. He drew his hand over his beard and said, with a mocking smile:

"You wanted to start yesterday."

"But I have changed my mind to-day, for I intend to have an interview with your friend before I go."

"And expose yourself to ridicule unnecessarily? Don't be a child, Mary."

"I want her to know that I shall not consent to a divorce."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it."

She stared at him and mechanically took up the full glass.

"You are glad to hear it?" she asked, incredulously.

"Certainly," he replied. "Was it I who proposed a divorce, or was it you? I intended to remain here only a short time longer, to reap what I had sowed. And that harvest you would have shared with me. Of course, that is out of the question now, since you have placed yourself in opposition to me. It is impossible for me to carry out my plans under these circumstances."

Her eyes were still fixed upon him, full of doubt. He had spoken so calmly, just as if he were expressing his inmost conviction.

"Then you would be willing to give up those plans?" she asked.

"Can I do otherwise? You force me to it."

"And how do you intend we shall live together in future?"

"I have not thought of that yet; it will be a wretched existence. But, come what may, I shall do my duty."

"You have not done it so far."

"You cannot judge of that so long as you do not know the plans which I have been pursuing here."

"Which, as you say yourself, you are not at liberty to explain to me."

"I may be able to do so after a while," he replied, as he filled the glasses once more, and cast a furtive glance at Mary's face. "You will see then that all your suspicions were entirely false, and that you have done me great injustice."

"If I could only believe you!" she said thoughtfully.

"Will you start with me to-morrow?"

"No, the day after."

"So you still adhere to your purpose?"

"Your question convinces me that you do not like that purpose," she answered, resuming her former irritated tone. "Well, I will give it up if you will introduce me to the young widow to-morrow as your wife. As you are on friendly terms with her, you will have no difficulty in finding a suitable opportunity."

Sonnenberg had at first contracted his brows at this proposition, but he soon regained his composure.

"Your obstinacy is childish," he replied. "There is no object—"

"I wish to make the lady's acquaintance," she interrupted him.

"And if I refuse to introduce you to her?"

"Then I shall call on her to-morrow. So you may do as you like. I shall not leave until I have spoken to the widow. Things will have to be very different before I can trust you again. I cannot guess what you intend to do. You may change your mind again after we have reached London. I want to make sure of the future, in any case. Nothing in the world can make me doubt what I have seen with my own eyes, and I consider it my duty to warn that lady against you."

"What nonsense!"

"On the contrary, John, it is the truth, which cannot be denied. I also wish to learn, to-morrow, which of your names you have a right to. If you have married me under a false name you shall rue it."

Sonnenberg had for some time been pacing restlessly to and fro. He now stopped before his wife's chair, and said, carelessly:

"You are tormenting yourself unnecessarily. If I have appeared here under a false name, I had my special reasons for so doing, which, however, are entirely different from what you suppose them to be. I

will prove to you that you are wrong by introducing you to the lady to-morrow. Are you satisfied?"

"Very well," said Mary; "and how is it to be done?"

"I will call for you about noon and take you to her house. I must insist, however, upon your not embarrassing me by mentioning the name of Brighton."

"Well, I consent. I will yield to you in that particular as well."

"And now I think it is time for you to return to your hotel," continued Sonnenberg, consulting his watch. "Did you go there after the theatre?"

"No!" she replied, rising from her chair.

"Then you have had no supper? You will hardly get anything at the hotel at this late hour. Those third-class houses close early—"

"It does not matter," she interrupted him, bitterly, as she drew her gray cloak around her. "Hunger does not trouble me now that I have become used to it. Your wine is heavy, it has gone to my head."

"That is because your stomach is empty," he replied. "I know of a restaurant which will be open now, let us go there."

"I thought you did not wish to be seen in my company here?"

"Now that I have decided to leave this place with you, such precautions are no longer necessary. And when you have had a good supper, you will look at our affairs in a more conciliatory spirit," he added, buttoning his overcoat. "Have the goodness to follow me on tiptoe and not to utter a sound as long as we are in the house. It would be extremely disagreeable for me to be asked to-morrow—"

"Make your mind easy; I will not get you into trouble. Though it seems very strange that a wife

should be obliged to steal out of her husband's house so secretly; but—"

"The fault lies in the circumstances. When we are in our garret once more, we shall be able to come and go as we like. Nothing else will satisfy you."

"No, because I am determined not to be deceived by you any longer!"

"And consequently you deceive yourself."

"No matter! Want, care and misery have grown indifferent to me; all I demand is that you should share them with me in the future, for it is to you alone that I owe them! I do not need your escort, however."

"Have you forgotten those drunken fellows?"

"Well then, come; I accept your offer with thanks!"

He opened the door and led her down the stairs and, according to her promise, she took pains to avoid making the slightest sound.

Thus they left the house. He locked the street-door noiselessly, and offered her his arm, which she took; then they walked away in silence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LADY IN GRAY.

Frau Winkler was still at breakfast when the box-opener was announced, and soon after entered the room with the handkerchief in her hand.

As Dora had anticipated, Ernestine was present. The former requested her companion to get some change from the kitchen, as she had nothing but gold pieces in her purse.

"Only one question," she said in a low voice, when Ernestine, after some hesitation, had left. "Is the address in the handkerchief?"

The woman nodded.

"She gave it to me herself," she replied.

Dora hastily handed her a gold piece, which she had scarcely pocketed when Ernestine returned and laid some loose silver on the table.

"Please give her the money," said Dora carelessly. "Thank you, my good woman. I am glad you are so honest."

"Honesty is the best policy, ma'am," replied the box-opener, demurely. "I have tried to be honest all my life."

"I 'm glad to hear it," said Dora, dismissing her with a wave of the hand. "Continue in the same way. Good-by."

"I have some errands to do this morning," she went on when the woman had left. "I ought to have gone to the jeweler's and to have seen about my new dress long ago; but, with all these troubles, I have not felt in the mood for it."

"I have told you again and again that you ought to rise above these things," replied Ernestine, whose gray eyes expressed unmistakable mistrust. "They only excite you, and your depression lowers you in the eyes of others. I am very glad that you showed yourself at the opera last night. If I were you I would go often now, and also subscribe to the Philharmonic concerts."

"And do you expect Herr Sonnenberg to be my escort on all such occasions?" asked Dora, with a quick, searching glance at Ernestine's thin face.

"No, I was not thinking of that; but, if it were the case, nobody would object to it."

"Would not those others, to whose opinion you wish me to defer, make comments upon it."

"Comments? At the utmost they might suppose that you were engaged to him, and that is not a supposition that ought to vex you, for Herr Sonnenberg is a handsome and agreeable man and thorough gentleman."

"Well, well, you are taking his part very earnestly. I always fancied that you were not a very good friend of his."

"He is no more to me than any other man, and if I praise him, I only speak the truth. And, altogether, I am only thinking of your welfare, which, as you must know, I have very much at heart."

"I think I can manage to take care of it myself," replied Dora, rising. "I hope Herr Sonnenberg will have sufficient sense not to cherish any hopes, of the fulfillment of which he cannot be sure."

"Well, most men are inclined to cherish such hopes,

and we cannot forbid their doing so," remarked Ernestine, with a smile. "Herr Sonnenburg has not confided his thoughts on the subject to me, but I should not find it unnatural if he had considered the possibility of his supplying to you the place of a man who has proved himself unworthy of your love. I hardly think, however, that he will ever broach the matter to you."

"In that case it is quite superfluous to discuss such a possibility," rejoined Dora. "He might receive an answer to his question which would not please him. But I must go now, or I shall not get through before dinner."

"Shall I go with you?"

"No, it is unnecessary, as I shall make no purchases for which I need your advice. Be so good as to have the rooms thoroughly aired and dusted while I am gone. Our old Katherine has grown very careless of late and needs stirring up a little. Well, I can safely leave that to you."

"If you do not mind the war which will follow such a stirring-up. We shall see nothing but cross looks for a week."

"We are quite used to that, you know; and if we don't want to see a cross face we can look beyond it," said Dora, serenely. "We all of us have to do our duty, whether we are masters or servants."

With this she left the room to prepare for her outing. She did not see the spiteful look which Ernestine sent after her.

"I belong to the servants too, I suppose," muttered the latter, as she gathered up the breakfast-dishes; "did she mean to remind me of that! Heaven knows what has suddenly got into her head. I can't help thinking, after all, that the colonel has done us some ill turn. I must be on my guard. Be they ever so wise they shall not spoil this game for me."

Dora reappeared, dressed for the street. The happy smile with which she had left the room still hovered around her rosy lips, and gave her lovely face an animated, arch expression.

"If Sonnenberg should call he will have to wait till I return," she said. "I hope you will have the kindness to entertain him till then."

"Gladly, if he will be satisfied with my company," replied Ernestine. "Shall I send for a cab?"

"Oh no; I should have to wait too long. I may find one on the way, if I need it. Good-by!"

With these words she nodded pleasantly to her companion, and left the room.

"If she only knew where I am going!" she said to herself, as she left the house. "Intrigue against intrigue; we'll see who carries off the victory in this contest."

With rapid steps she took the way to Colonel von Wartenfel's residence, where she found herself impatiently expected.

Fannie hastened to meet her, and Dora held her in a long embrace.

"I may allow myself to love him again. Do you know what that means?" she cried. "I am so glad, so happy, that no words can express it. I would like to shout for joy, and yet I have to lock up all my rapture in my heart!"

"Patience!" replied Fannie, with a low sigh. "All is still dark before us, but let us hope that the dawn is not far off, and that light will soon break in upon us. If Gustav could have spoken and enlightened you as to the promissory note you would not have broken your engagement, nor would he have gone to Roland's that night, or thought of leaving town."

"An unfortunate chain of accidental circumstances,

which all seemed to testify against him," said Dora, as they seated themselves. "We will not despair, however, my dear child. On the contrary, these difficulties ought to increase our courage and our perseverance. And now tell me what you suspect, what you have discovered and what you have done in the matter."

Fannie at once enumerated all the grounds for suspicion against Sonnenberg. She spoke of the confidential interview between him and Ernestine which she had witnessed, and ended by repeating the conversation which she and her uncle had held with Doctor Kerner with regard to these matters.

And then Dora told her about the lady in gray and her strange conduct at the opera, and finally showed her the paper given her by the box-opener, on which was written, in large, plain characters:

Mrs. Mary Brighton,

From London.

Black Eagle Hotel.

During the interview and before Dora had commenced her report, the old colonel entered the room.

He was about to place his pipe in a corner; but Dora, smiling, signed to him not to incommode himself on her account, and he therefore took a seat and went on smoking in silence, now and then showing, by a look or a nod, that he was listening with undivided attention.

"And you cannot remember ever to have seen the lady before?" he asked, when Dora ceased.

"No, she was an entire stranger to me, and I am sure she could not have known me either."

"It seems probable, therefore, that her strange stare was directed at Sonnenberg?"

"I must suppose so, in spite of the indifference with which he denied any acquaintance with her."

"The deuce! That might lead to an important discovery."

"Don't be too sure, uncle dear," said Fannie, doubtfully; "it may amount to very little. That lady may be a former sweetheart of Sonnenberg's whom he has deserted; but what could we learn from her, even if that were the case?"

"Possibly more than you think," replied Dora, confidently. "A woman who has been deserted by a man generally thirsts for revenge, and such a sentiment might afford us a deep insight into Sonnenberg's past life. Much depends upon our learning something on that subject, on our discovering something which we can follow up."

"Of course," said the colonel. "If we can prove to Judge Hartmann that Sonnenberg is an adventurer with a doubtful record, we shall have gained a great deal. Once the probability of a suspicion is established, that suspicion itself will follow. I have not been idle in the meantime," he continued, enveloping himself in thick clouds of smoke. "I have investigated in all directions, and last night I discovered a gentleman who was present at the wedding-entertainment at Roland's. After dinner some of the guests were taking their coffee in Frau Roland's boudoir, and among those present were Sonnenberg, Roland and the man in question. On this occasion Roland told his guests that he had an unusually large sum of money in his safe, and, in the course of the conversation, he also mentioned that there was a third key to the safe in the drawer of his writing-desk."

"Ah, that is important, very important!" cried Fannie, with sparkling eyes. "Did the gentleman attach any suspicion to that circumstance?"

"No," replied the colonel. "I suppose he did not venture to express any, and such a possibility may not even have occurred to him at all. You know every one thinks that the thief has been discovered."

"Then we had better inform Judge Hartmann of that incident."

"And accuse Sonnenberg in doing so?" asked Dora, thoughtfully. "What proofs can you give for such an accusation? None whatever. And mere surmises, my dear, are not valid in law."

"Then we must tell Doctor Kerner of it," replied Fannie, quite impatiently.

"I did so last evening," said the colonel. "The doctor admits that this discovery may be of importance, but he warns us not to be over hasty."

"And I agree with him," observed Dora, gravely. "If your surmises are correct, Fannie, Sonnenberg is a very dangerous character, and in that case we may consider him capable of anything. We must be extremely cautious. We ought not to speak until we have certain proofs."

"I feel that you are right; but, at the same time, we cannot help wishing to speedily liberate Gustav."

"If that were in our power it should be done this very day," replied the colonel; "but it can't be made short work of. Frau Winkler is right. We may expect the worst from a fellow like Sonnenberg. If he should scent danger he would be off in a trice; and once he is gone there 'll be an end to all investigations, and we may be sure of Gustav's conviction. That is the danger which we must avoid above everything. Madam, may I be allowed to ask an indiscreet question?"

"Certainly," Dora answered, looking at him expectantly.

"Has Sonnenberg ever said anything to you which might imply that he has designs upon your hand?"

"No."

"But you think he has them?"

"Yes. I have thought so since this morning when Ernestine hinted at the possibility of my becoming engaged to him."

"Well and good; that shows pretty plainly that he has confided his plans to your companion and secured her assistance for their execution. You will not deny that?"

"By no means, my dear sir."

The old gentleman nodded, well satisfied. He paced to and fro slowly; the expression of his face grew more and more calm and serene.

"Then we have the means of keeping him here," he said. "It may be disagreeable to you, my dear madam, but if you have forgiven my dear boy, you will, I am sure, be willing to make this sacrifice. You must allow Sonnenberg to believe that there is a possibility of his wishes being fulfilled; indeed, it would even be expedient for you to encourage him in that belief."

"That will be a hard task," replied Dora, in a low voice, while her delicately-penciled eyebrows were slightly contracted; "but if it is absolutely necessary I will undertake it."

"I will merely direct your attention to the fact that Sonnenberg will probably leave town immediately if he finds that he cannot gain his end. If you once convince him of that, and you might do so by some thoughtless remark, nothing will keep him here, and he will no longer delay to make sure of his booty."

"Yes, you are right," said Dora, and her mouth as-

sumed a resolute expression; "it must be done; he must be kept here until we have succeeded in finding proofs against him. Well, you may leave that to me; words and glances cost nothing, and women, you know, are adepts in the art of dissimulation."

"You will have to practice the same dissimulation toward your companion."

"I do not forget that, but I shall have no mercy on her, when the day of reckoning comes."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the colonel. "So that is all settled. You will delude Sonnenberg, so as to keep him here and watch him and Frau Hennig; while we, Fannie, Doctor Kerner and I, will seek for proofs. If we have anything to communicate to one another, we will meet here. At your house, madam, there would be danger of our being overheard, and then all would be lost. I don't know but that we ought to inform Roland of our suspicion. He must, of course, be very anxious to recover the whole amount stolen, and for that reason, perhaps—"

"No, let us not do that!" Dora quickly interrupted him. "Sonnenberg certainly pretends to be very indignant at my connections, but I think he dissembles in that, too, and I even suspect that they wish me to marry him."

"Well, then, we will leave that hornet's nest alone. Does your brother agree with them?"

"The councillor?" asked Dora, disdainfully. "He does nothing but dance to his mother-in-law's fiddle; we cannot count upon his help. No, colonel; in my opinion there are enough persons in the secret now, and the only one whom it might be well to add to their number woul be a skillful official of the criminal police. Fannie, will you be so good as to send for a cab, and get yourself ready to go out with me? I should like to have you accompany me to the Black Eagle."

"But do you think it quite prudent to look up that lady there?"

"Why not? I suppose I may ask her why she stared at me so last night? I should not be afraid to do so even in Sonnenberg's presence."

"I don't see any risk in your going there," said the colonel; "and if the lady has reasons for hating Sonnenberg she will not betray your visit."

Fannie hastily left the room and the old gentleman resumed his walk.

"We have spoken to Doctor Kerner about a detective," he said, "but he does not quite enter into the idea, and prefers, for the present, to make inquiries with regard to Sonnenberg's antecedents as well as his present circumstances."

"I hope confidently that we shall find out something now. The lady's face so evidently expressed the deepest hatred."

"Which possibly was merely caused by jealousy."

"That may be; but it is just on that jealousy that I build my firmest hopes. If we can find only one spot on Sonnenberg's past record, and furnish convincing proof that he is an adventurer, we shall have gained a great deal. Don't you think so?"

"Well, we cannot tell," replied the old gentleman. "As I said before, if the fellow smells powder he will be off, never to return, and then nothing can be proved against him. So we cannot be cautious enough."

"I shall do my part, you may be sure," said Dora, rising. "I am ready to make any sacrifice, however great, in order to restore liberty and honor to my beloved Gustav and thus regain my own happiness."

At this moment Fannie entered the room in her hat and cloak; the cab was already at the door.

The colonel would gladly have accompanied the

ladies, but he yielded gracefully to Dora's objection that an escort was unnecessary.

The cab rolled away. The noise in the streets and the rattling of the wheels made a conversation impossible.

The Black Eagle was soon reached. It was situated on a quiet street and, although a third-class hotel, was well frequented, owing to its excellent accommodations and table.

As the cab drew up before the house the head-waiter rushed from the dining-room, his napkin hanging gracefully over his arm, and received the ladies with a low bow.

"We have a fine room, with two beds, on the first floor," he said, with a questioning glance.

"Pray do not trouble yourself," said Dora, pleasantly. "We merely came to call on a lady."

"Oh, excuse me, madam. May I ask the name of the lady you wish to see?"

"Mrs. Brighton, from London."

The head-waiter rubbed his smoothly shaven chin with his chubby hand, and looked at the ladies with an embarrassed air.

"Mrs. Mary Brighton, from London?" he repeated. "Are you well acquainted with the lady, madam?"

"May I ask you to explain your object in asking that question?"

"Well, no one can blame us for wanting to know what has become of guests who take French leave."

"You do not mean to say—"

"That Mrs. Brighton has left without saying good-by? Yes, that is what I am forced to think. But will not the ladies come into the house? There is a strong draught here. We are used to it, but you might catch cold."

He opened the door of the dining-room as he spoke, and Dora and Fannie entered.

The head-waiter led them to a corner and provided them with chairs.

"You do not seem to have any other explanation for her disappearance either, ladies?" he went on. "I can hardly think anything has happened to her, although I must admit that there is such a possibility. Mrs. Brighton ordered the porter to get her a ticket for the opera for last night."

"For a seat in a third-tier box?" asked Dora, impatiently.

"That may be. The porter will know. After dinner yesterday she asked for her bill and paid it, but said nothing about leaving—not even when she got into the cab to go to the theatre."

"That is very strange," observed Dora, with increasing concern. "Had she no luggage?"

"Good gracious! Luggage?" asked the fat little man, passing his hands over his short, bristling hair. "No, madam, not to speak of. An empty valise, a nightgown, a comb and a toothbrush—that is all there is upstairs."

"But she would not be likely to have left those articles behind her if she had gone away," replied Dora. "Particularly as she had paid what she owed here."

"That is so," he replied briskly; "but she may have had other reasons for decamping."

"Or she may return in the course of the day."

"That is quite possible. Would you like me to let you know in that case?"

"Yes, I should, but—"

She stopped; her eye fell upon a police officer who had just entered the room and was approaching them with rapid steps.

"I suppose you are the landlord or the head-waiter of this hotel?" he said to the little man, who hastily threw his napkin over his shoulder.

"The head-waiter, at your service," he replied, with a searching look at a short, slight gentleman, who stood behind the officer with his hands in his pockets, and returned the waiter's questioning glance with a good-natured smile. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Do you know this card?" asked the officer, handing him a damp slip of paper, the writing of which was almost obliterated. It is one of your billheads, but there is no name on it; the date and number of the room are illegible."

"The head-waiter stared at the paper for a while, and then went to his desk to consult the ledger.

"May I ask where you found this paper?" he said.

"It was found in the pocket of a dead lady who was taken from the river a while ago," was the rather blunt answer.

"Good God, Mrs. Brighton!" exclaimed the head-waiter, with arched eyebrows, turning to Dora, who had grown deadly pale. "You know I said, madam, that she might have met with an accident, but I did not think of anything like this!"

"Please describe the lady to me," said the officer, opening his notebook.

"She was thin, plain-featured, had reddish hair, and was dressed in gray."

"Correct! What did you say her name was?"

"Mrs. Mary Brighton, from London," replied Dora, although the question had not been addressed to her, but to the head-waiter.

"You were a friend of the lady's, madam?"

"Not at all."

"Or acquainted with her?"

"Not even that. I came here to make her acquaintance."

"For particular reasons?"

"For the simple reason that the lady attracted my attention last evening at the opera," replied Dora. "She sat opposite me in an upper box and hardly took her eyes off me; that struck me as very singular, and, consequently, I resolved to call on her and ask what was her object in staring at me so."

"A strange reason, don't you think so?" said the officer, turning to the thin, elderly gentleman, who stood behind him.

"I?" replied the latter. "What have I to do with this affair?"

As he said this, his clean-shaven, extremely good-natured face still retained its pleasant smile and he calmly drew from his pocket a very plain snuff-box, from which he helped himself.

"It is a reason which is easy to understand," rejoined Dora, without concealing her displeasure at the doubt implied. "I asked the box-opener to obtain the lady's address for me. She gave it to me this morning, and when I came here I heard that the lady had not yet returned."

"Have you any information to give on the subject?" continued the officer, once more addressing the head-waiter, who was turning over the leaves of the ledger. "Did you notice anything unusual in the lady?"

"Not that I know of," was the answer.

"When did she arrive?"

"Day before yesterday, after dinner."

"Did she mention the object of her coming?"

"No, for we did not ask her. We are not inquisitive here. At our hotel every guest can live as he likes."

"Did she ask after the address of any person residing

here on whom she intended to call? Or did she have any visitors?"

"Neither. Nobody came to see her, and she only went out twice, both times in the evening. Night before last she was probably also at some theatre, for she did not return till after midnight."

"Alone?"

"Alone and on foot. Such things are not surprising in a travelling Englishwoman."

"And did she not go out at any other time?"

"No; she spent the whole of yesterday in her room."

"Writing letters?"

"Possibly; I cannot tell."

"Did she have any money?" the officer continued. "Much luggage or any jewelry?"

"She must have had money, for she asked for her bill and paid it yesterday noon. I saw no heavy luggage nor any jewelry. We have rarely had a lady here with so little luggage as this one. It is all in her room upstairs. You can see for yourself."

"I will, later on. So she wore no jewelry, either?"

"Not as far as I know," replied the head-waiter, raising his eyebrows. "But you ask as if you suspected some crime. I hope the poor lady has not met with foul play?"

At this question Dora and Fannie also looked at the officer in anxious expectation.

He shrugged his shoulders evasively.

"Nothing can be determined about that yet," he said. "There must be a *post-mortem* examination first. It may prove to be a case of suicide. One of your servants had better go back with me to identify the body."

"The porter can go. He knew the lady."

"Very well. Then you know nothing from which it might be inferred that the lady took her own life?"

"Nothing whatever."

"And no letter was found in her room?"

"I am sure the chambermaid would have given it to me."

"Well, we will go and look," said the officer, proceeding toward the door, and the head-waiter followed him without delay.

The ladies and the kindly old gentleman remained alone in the dining-room.

"An every-day occurrence!" remarked the latter.

"Do you think so?" asked Dora, aroused from her reflections.

"Probably a case of disappointed love. Good heavens! What follies love causes people to commit!"

"You may be right," was Dora's rejoinder, while the old gentleman once more took his snuff-box and twirled it between his fingers. "She may have come here to look for a faithless lover and may not have found him."

"Or, perhaps, she saw him in your company, madam."

"From what do you infer that?"

"From the strange manner in which you say she stared at you."

"I am a widow, sir."

"That does not affect the probability of my supposition."

"Well, perhaps I attach too much importance to that staring," continued Dora, who did not wish to mention Sonnenberg's name. "She may have done it unintentionally while she was thinking of suicide."

Just then the officer and the head-waiter returned.

They had found nothing in Mrs. Brighton's room which could throw any light on the matter in question.

Dora and Fannie reëntered their cab just as the officer, with the porter, left the hotel for the purpose of having

the body identified. No one had thought of inquiring for the names of the ladies.

"What do you say now?" asked Fannie, sadly, as they drove away rapidly.

Dora looked thoughtfully out of the window. The quivering of her firmly-closed lips betokened her inward agitation.

"What should I say?" she replied. "It is quite possible that the old gentleman is right, and that disappointed love drove the poor woman to her death. It may be that she was Sonnenberg's mistress, and that when she saw me with him last night she thought all was lost for her."

"In such a case, however, hate asserts its rights and demands satisfaction. The woman would certainly have enlightened you as to Sonnenberg's character, in order to revenge herself on him, before taking such a step."

"That, too, is merely a supposition, Fannie. At such times of utter despair no one reflects long; life has suddenly become a burden, and the wish to cast it off overcomes every other feeling."

"And if a crime has been committed?"

Dora looked up in horror.

"Must it necessarily have been he who committed it?" she asked.

"Do you consider that impossible?"

"I beg of you, Fannie, let us not discuss this subject any farther, at least not now. There is no reason for our doing so, before we know whether the poor woman committed suicide or was murdered."

"And I cannot help telling you that I suspect the latter to be the case," replied Fannie with convincing confidence. "The police officer's questions seemed to point to that."

"And if so, I repeat, need it have been Sonnenberg who did it? Cannot the lady have had other acquaintances here whom she met after the opera? Is it not possible that she was attacked by thieves on her way home, who killed her in order to rob her? If Sonnenberg had known her, would he not have called on her at the hotel?"

"They may have met after leaving the theatre."

"And you really think Sonnenberg would have at once resorted to this horrible means of ridding himself of her?"

"We cannot tell with what she may have threatened him. In the mind of such a man resolutions are quickly formed and as quickly carried out."

Dora remained lost in thought for a long while, and looked out into the street deep in silence.

"You may be right," she said at last. "At any rate, we must await the result of the *post-mortem* examination, and if that proves that a crime has been committed, the authorities will take the matter in hand. We can do nothing."

"Have you already forgotten our suspicion of Sonnenberg?" asked Fannie, reproachfully. "Are all investigations to cease now?"

"By no means; but, above all, let us remember the colonel's very wise warning. You can seek for proofs in secret; I cannot do so. Ernestine's keen eyes are watching me constantly, and it may be that just now only a very trifling occasion is needed to induce Sonnenberg to leave town at once. How horrible if he were really a murderer, and I had to receive him, nevertheless, as a welcome friend! And yet it must be done! And I shall even have to be doubly agreeable and attentive to him in order to dispel any doubts on his part and to encourage his hopes."

"That will certainly be a difficult task."

"Not so much difficult as disagreeable; but I shall accomplish it. I do not suppose that we can keep our inquiries about Mrs. Brighton secret; it is not improbable that I may be involved in the investigation which must take place, and so it seems best that I should speak openly of the matter, without connecting any surmises with it. Sonnenberg cannot find anything surprising in my going to see Mrs. Brighton, and I shall take the opportunity to watch him closely and see what impression the news makes on him."

"Yes, indeed," replied Fannie, with animation; "and the result of your observations may furnish us with a new clue. Of course, I cannot keep this event a secret from uncle either; he will ask me what we have found out."

"Why should you keep it secret? Just talk to him unreservedly about it. He will agree with me that we ought to exercise the utmost caution in this matter, as well as in others. Here we are at your house. Please tell the driver where to take me. I 'll see you soon again, dear. Don't lose courage; all may come right yet."

"Let us hope so," said Fannie, returning the pressure of Dora's hand. "When may I expect you?"

"As soon as I have learned anything new. I dare not come too often. You know I have always taken Ernestine with me until now. She will think it strange if I go out without her. If you have anything to tell me, just drop me a line and I will come to you. Remember me to the colonel and keep up a stout heart."

She gave Fannie a farewell nod and drove home. The maid informed her that Sonnenberg had been waiting for her over half an hour. She went to her

bedroom to take off her hat and cloak; and if Fannie could have seen her face just then, she would have felt sure that Dora shared her suspicion.

But the dark expression which her features wore soon vanished. When she had passed her hand over her face a few times, the shadows had departed and were not even discernible to the keen eye of Sonnenberg, who came to meet her as she entered the drawing-room.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting," she said, as she gave him her hand; "but my return was delayed by a very unpleasant occurrence. You remember that lady in gray, to whom I directed your attention last night at the opera?"

It seemed to her as if his hand, which had retained her own, trembled slightly; but no change appeared in the cold, impassive expression of his face.

"Have you met her again?" he asked in a tone of indifference.

"No; but I intended to meet her in order to discover why I had been the object of her very conspicuous attention."

"Oh, you knew her, then?"

"Not in the least."

"How did you expect to find her!"

"Well, I had obtained her address," replied Dora, smiling. "You know one can get anything for money. She was a Mrs. Mary Brighton, from London. Do you know the name?"

"No," he replied calmly, negligently toying with his eyeglass. "This is the first time I have heard it."

"Don't you know it either, Ernestine?"

"I do not remember ever to have heard it," replied her companion carelessly, while at the same time her features showed a certain degree of interest. "From London? And does she live here now?"

"She was stopping at the Black Eagle Hotel, and the shortest way was for me to call on her there. I was sure she would feel that she owed me an explanation. Don't you agree with me, Herr Sonnenberg?"

"I told you last night that your beauty was doubtless the magnet."

"That supposition did not satisfy me. My curiosity demanded a more probable explanation. And you can judge of my horror when I was told at the Black Eagle that the lady had been found drowned in the river this morning!"

Dora leaned back in her chair at these words, and a keen, searching glance flew like lightning from under her half-closed lids to Sonnenberg's face, in which not a muscle moved even now, while Ernestine started from her seat.

"That was, indeed, a very unpleasant surprise," said the former, in a voice that was slightly unsteady. "Who told you of it?"

"A police officer, who came to the Black Eagle to make inquiries about the lady. A card of the hotel had been found in her pocket."

"Indeed; and it was the same lady in gray?"

"Undoubtedly

"Was it a case of suicide?" asked Sonnenberg, whose voice once more sounded firm and cold.

"That was the officer's opinion."

"Such things happen every day," remarked Ernestine. "Probably a poor unfortunate creature who had no longer any means of subsistence. And such people generally have too much false pride to ask for help."

"Yes, unhappily, such things occur every day," replied Sonnenberg, with a sharp furtive glance at Dora, who pretended to be lost in thought, but, nevertheless, was on her guard, and noticed this glance. "Possibly she

had even last night resolved to take this step, and that was the cause of her fixed, wild look, which may not have been intended for you at all."

"It has been proved that she was not without means," said Dora; "she paid her bill at the hotel, yesterday noon."

"Perhaps she had just enough left for that," remarked Ernestine, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That small sum could not help her much. Why should she not pay what she owed!"

"And then she was at the opera, too."

"And why not? It oftens happens that a man contemplating suicide treats himself to a feast shortly before his end; indeed there have been cases when such a one sent a bullet through his head in the midst of a convivial gathering, and over a glass of champagne."

"You are right; her visit to the theatre proves nothing," said Sonnenberg. "I suppose the police officer obtained no clue at the hotel?"

"No."

"And no papers were found on the lady or in her room?"

"I heard of none. It was said that she had very little luggage, but that is no sign of poverty. Englishwomen are in the habit of travelling without encumbrances."

"Sonnenberg had placed his eyeglass on his nose; he still preserved the most imperturbable composure.

Dora could not find in his face any trace of a deeper interest in this affair, much less of a sense of guilt.

"Don't trouble yourself any further about the matter, my dear madam," he said cheerfully. "None of us knew the lady; consequently her fate cannot interest us. If you wish it, however, I will inquire about her and try to find out the reason for her suicide."

"Do you think you can do so?"

"I will do my best and hope to succeed."

"Well, then, if you will be so kind, you will do me a great favor, for I cannot deny that I would like to know more about the poor woman."

"Why, Dora, I am surprised at you!" said Ernestine. "You saw that woman for the first time last evening, and have never spoken a word to her. How can you take such an interest in her now that she is dead? That her eyes were fixed on you was probably quite accidental. In despair, and resolved to put an end to her existence, she was gazing at vacancy."

"I do not think so; there was something else in that face than the mere brooding over a fatal decision. Her features were distorted by conflicting passions."

"And what passions were they?" asked Sonnenberg.

"Hatred and anger," she replied, looking at him keenly. "The woman had not closed her account with life at that time."

"Then the passions that were let loose within her probably led her to a sudden resolve," remarked Ernestine, "At any rate, you cannot connect the expression of her face with yourself; you did not know her."

Sonnenberg, who had been putting on his gloves, now rose and said:

"I quite agree with Frau Hennig; but possibly my investigations will lead to a satisfactory solution of these questions. May I have the honor again this evening, madam?"

Dora had lowered her eyes; she felt that he was watching her, and that she must not betray her suspicions.

"My nerves have not quite recovered from the shock they received this morning," she replied; "but I think I shall feel better to-night. I must ask you, however,

to procure another box; if I were to sit in the same place as last evening I should constantly be reminded of that dreadful face, with its fixed stare."

"I will attend to it," he answered, bowing and raising the hand, which she extended to him, to his lips. "Till to-night then, I hope with all my heart you will succeed in banishing these thoughts from your mind."

Dora nodded with a constrained smile, apparently indicating thereby that she cherished the same hope and would try to fulfill his wish.

Ernestine accompanied Sonnenberg into the hall. They did not suspect that Dora was watching them closely.

"What is it about that lady?" Ernestine asked, in a low tone, while her gray eyes rested, with a penetrating look, upon her companion, who slowly stroked his beard.

"Nonsense!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "I know nothing about her."

"Really not. Tell me the truth, Theo."

"No, really not."

"You were in England a long time."

"I don't deny that. I may have met the woman there on some occasion; but, if so, she made no impression on me, for I had no recollection of her last night."

"And yet there was really such a terrible expression in her face that I can well understand Dora's interest in her."

"Then I can only suppose that the woman had some reason for hating Dora Winkler which we two do not know. I think we had better not try to discover that reason; it is none of our business, and the woman is dead."

The composure with which Sonnenberg said this

seemed to reassure Ernestine. She looked searchingly into his eyes once more and nodded.

"I wish this had not happened," she said. "I fear it may retard our steps."

"If you were right, Dora would not be going to the theatre with me to-night."

"To be sure, that is true. Do you intend to inquire about that Englishwoman?"

"Certainly; I have promised to do so. But don't worry about the matter. It is nonsense to attach so much importance to that event."

With this Sonnenberg bade her good-by, and she returned thoughtfully to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING.

The hopes which Franciska had formed on the sudden death of the Englishwoman were not fulfilled.

The *post-mortem* examination established that, to all appearances, the case was one of suicide, for, with the exception of a slight wound at the back of the head, no injuries had been found on the body.

The wound in question, which was quite insignificant, might have been occasioned by the fall into the river, or even later, by contact with some sharp body in the water. It afforded no cause for a judicial inquiry, particularly as all other circumstances seemed to point to suicide.

The body had not been robbed. A purse was found in the pocket of the dress, and, according to the testimony of the people at the Black Eagle, the lady had worn no jewelry.

The few articles she had left behind and her careful seclusion on the day before her death also confirmed the probability of suicide, and, moreover, no one could be found who had heard a cry for help that night.

The authorities wrote to London and received the answer that Mrs. Mary Brighton had for some time been living separated from her husband and in needy

circumstances, but that there was no further information to be given about her.

The proceedings were therefore closed, and those who, at the first moment, had cast so terrible a suspicion upon Sonnenberg, no longer ventured to proclaim it.

Nor was there any evidence of guilt to be found with regard to the robbery which could confirm their distrust of Sonnenberg.

For the few who still believed in Dornberg's innocence, the matter remained a profound mystery; while every one else, the examining magistrate and the attorney-general at the head, were convinced of the guilt of the accused.

One evening Dora, much disheartened, had excused herself, on the plea of fatigue, from accompanying Ernestine and Sonnenberg to the theater, and planned a visit to Fannie instead.

"Has the carriage come?" she asked the servant, who just then entered the room.

"This minute, ma'am," replied Katherine, with a keen look at her mistress. "If Frau Hennig should get home before you—"

"Well, then tell her that I have gone out on an errand," Dora interrupted her. "I hardly think she will, however; I shall probably return before the opera is over."

"I don't think so either," said the old woman, in so cross and crabbed a tone that Dora looked at her in surprise. "Those two will have a good deal to say to each other."

"Sonnenberg and Ernestine?"

"Yes, indeed, ma'am; here they have to do it on the sly, and don't often get a chance. I noticed their whisperings long ago."

"Do you mean that those two have secrets together? I can hardly believe that!"

"And yet it 's true."

"Do you happen to know anything about the nature of those secrets?"

"Well, I can guess something; they are too sly to let any one see their cards. And I 'm not sure as to how you look at the matter, ma'am."

"Just speak your mind freely. I should think we had lived together long enough for you to take that liberty."

"Herr Sonnenberg hopes to marry you some day ma'am, and Frau Hennig would be glad to have his hopes fulfilled. That 's my opinion, and if I was mistress here, I 'd have turned them both out of the house long ago."

Dora laughed heartily, while the old servant helped her put on her cloak.

"I fear the same thing would happen to you if they were masters here," she said. "I have heard complaints enough about you; so the dislike seems to be mutual. You can set your mind at rest on one point, however: If there should be a change here some day it will not be you who are turned out. Watch those two whenever you can. I hope we may find some opportunity of surprising them at their secrets."

"If that is what you want, ma'am, I 'll see that it 's done," said Katherine, well pleased. "If only Herr Dornberg would come back!"

Dora was standing before the glass, tying her bonnet-strings, and a happy smile passed over her lovely face.

"Then you are among the few who do not believe in Herr Dornberg's guilt?" she asked.

"I shall not believe in it even if he is convicted."

"That is right," said Dora, putting on her gloves.

"Hold to that opinion and be watchful and discreet. All may come right yet."

With this she left the room, and soon after was on her way to Colonel von Wartenfels's residence.

Fannie and Doctor Kerner were sitting together, engaged in animated conversation. The old colonel was not at home, and Kurt, soon after dinner, had ridden out to Elm Court, having followed his father's advice with regard to cultivating more diligently the acquaintance of Baron Busse and his daughter Vera.

When Dora entered the room, she at once read in Fannie's anxious features that no good news awaited her.

She hastily laid aside her bonnet and cloak, and looked searchingly into Doctor Kerner's face.

"No proofs yet?" she asked, in a tone of concern.

"Nothing yet," he replied, shaking his head, regretfully. "I have made inquiries in every direction, but can learn nothing of Herr Sonnenberg's past life that could afford a foothold for our suspicions. He has said to have spent some time in England—"

"In England?" Dora interrupted him quickly. "Did not that make you think of Mrs. Brighton!"

"Certainly; but that lady is dead, and it has been proved that she committed suicide. No traces of him were found in England. The London police had no information to give with regard to him; and I could find out quite as little about his present circumstances. Opinions vary as to whether he is in debt, or from what sources he derives his means of subsistence, and no one can tell anything about him with certainty."

"It is said that he lives by gambling," remarked Fannie.

"Yes, some say that," continued the lawyer, "but it cannot be proved, and even if it were the case, no in-

dictment could be based upon that. I have had him watched, have examined witnesses, and allowed myself no rest, in order to free Dornberg from the accusation resting upon him, but in vain. Gustav himself persists in the explanation which he gave Judge Hartmann, and if the latter sees in that declaration only a support for the accusation, little or nothing can be said against it from a judicial point of view. Sonnenberg really had the nosebleed that evening; he was seen by several witnesses in the servants' room, trying to stop it. Then he went into the garden, from which he returned just after the robbery had been discovered."

"The cash-room overlooks the garden," said Dora, in an excited tone, "and the window was open."

"The janitor remembers distinctly that the door and window of that room had been locked and fastened by him," replied Doctor Kerner. "The window was found open subsequently, but it may have been opened from the inside. Moveover, Roland and Gustav Dornberg were the only ones who had keys to the cash-room door, and could have opened it."

"A simple lock like that can be opened noiselessly with a skeleton key," said Dora, once more, while Fannie, lost in thought, gazed fixedly before her. "If Sonnenberg is the adventurer we take him to be, he is probably familiar with such thievish practices as well."

"Yes, if he is, my dear madam!"

"Do you still doubt it, doctor?" asked Fannie, quickly.

"I can understand that you cling to this possibility," he replied, evasively, accompanying his words with a regretful shrug. "But where are the proofs?"

"If my conviction had demonstrative power, no further proofs would be needed," said Dora, in a confident tone. "I have observed the man long enough now to be able to form a correct opinion of him, and I

can assure you that I have sometimes felt a horror of him. I believe him capable of any bad action, and I should not at all be surprised to hear that he even had a murder on his conscience."

"Mrs. Brighton?" corroborated Fannie, looking at Dora questioningly.

"Yes; I cannot rid myself of the idea that he knew that lady well and that he had reason to fear her hatred. When I recall that face, as I saw it at the opera, I feel more and more convinced that those looks full of hatred could only have been meant for Sonnenberg. Unfortunately, the poor woman's death has made all further investigations impossible, and yet it seems to me as if more could have been discovered with regard to her in London."

"If your words are intended to imply a reproach for me, madam, I must protest that I do not deserve it," said the lawyer, taking some papers from his pocket. "Here are the proofs that I have neglected nothing to—"

"I do not reproach you in the least," continued Dora, interrupting him. "I am sure you have done all you could; but I think the matter ought to have been managed differently. We should have done better to send a skillful detective over to England. I think such a one could have discovered more. It may be possible that the poor woman took her own life, but I don't quite believe in that possibility."

"Nor I," said Fannie, quickly. "The moment I heard of her death the thought of a murder flashed across my mind. We ought not to have been so timid, Dora. We should have told the police officer of our suspicions and demanded a strict investigation."

"That remark, too, casts a reproach upon me," replied Doctor Kerner, "for it was I who advised you at that time not to take any step in the matter. The *post-*

mortem examination had shown that it was a case of suicide."

"Did that exclude the possibility of crime?" asked Dora.

"I will not say that, madam, but we should not have been justified in retaining Sonnenburg, if he had been induced by such steps on our part to leave town. No, ladies, whatever could be done has been done; that assurance I can give you. Suppositions, however well-founded they may seem, are of no account in law. It recognizes only facts and proofs."

"And all the proofs are against my brother now?" asked Fannie, in a trembling voice.

"Unfortunately," replied the lawyer. "The evidence is, indeed, purely circumstantial, as the money has not been found, but the attorney-general will doubtless succeed in making it convincing to the jury."

"And then?" asked Dora.

"We will not give up all hope yet. I shall do all in my power to refute the attorney-general's proofs, and it is possible that I may win the majority of the jurors to my side. It is also possible that some new evidence in favor of the accused may be brought forward during the trial."

"And even if that should happen, Gustav's acquittal would not exonerate him," remarked Fannie. "He would merely be discharged for want of proofs."

"Even that would be better than a conviction," replied Dora, while Doctor Kerner put up his papers and rose from his seat. "We rest our last hope on you, doctor."

"And you may rely upon it that I shall do all that is possible to realize that hope. I am still carrying on my secret investigations. It often happens that a fortunate accident leads, at the last moment, to unlooked-for discoveries."

"I have very little hope left," said Fannie with a sigh, as she shook hands with him. "I do not believe in the happy accidents you speak of."

"And yet they are possible," replied he, retaining her hand, while the tone of his voice as well as the look which he gave her expressed the warmest sympathy. "Do not despair, miss, even if your brother should be convicted. In that case we still have the right to demand a reversal of judgment, and we will avail ourselves of that right in order to gain time. And, as for you, my dear madam, I must ask you to continue to watch Sonnenberg; it is indispensable that you should still avoid everything which might awaken his suspicions and cause him to leave town."

"I shall do as you wish," said Dora; "but I can assure you that it is no easy task, for I feel nothing but loathing toward that man. The thought of my unhappy Gustav alone gives me strength to overcome that feeling."

"Have patience but a little while longer. And as for sending a detective to London, it is not too late to do that now. If you do not object to the costs, I could recommend to you a very able official of the criminal police who would be just the man for the job."

"Could he start to-morrow?" asked Dora, quickly.

"Probably."

"Very well, I shall be only too glad to pay whatever is necessary. If I could only speak to him myself! But he cannot come to me; my companion is Sonnenberg's confidante."

"I don't think it could arose any suspicions if you were to come to my office, ostensibly to consult with me on the probable result of the trial; you will find the detective there at noon precisely."

"I shall certainly come," said Dora, and the lawyer took his leave, after once more giving Fannie a long, encouraging look.

Somewhat later in the evening the porter of the Black Eagle was chatting with a visitor, who was no other than Clement Wolf, the former janitor at Roland's bank. The latter had heard that the "boots" of the hotel was soon to vacate his office, and had come to make inquiries of his old friend as to the possibility of his obtaining the place.

While they were still discussing the subject, a gentleman passed the window of the lodge, whom Wolf recognized at once.

"Herr Sonnenberg?" he said, in surprise. "Does he come here often?"

The porter looked after the newcomer.

"No," he said; "this is the first time I have seen him. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, he often came to Herr Roland's," replied Wolf, with a sneer. "You needn't wish to see him here very often, though."

"Stingy?" asked the porter, raising his eyebrows.

"Very," replied his friend, with a nod. "I actually don't know to this day whether his money is round or square."

"Good, I'll remember that. I'll make him understand that it will be to his own advantage not to forget me."

"Hm! Perhaps Herr Sonnenberg might accept a tip himself if it was offered to him in a generous way."

"Ah! Is that how the land lies with him?"

"I am convinced of it."

"Well, we know that sort of fellows too," said the porter with a sarcastic smile. "But there's no chance for him here. He won't gain a foothold in the Black

Eagle. I am only glad you told me about him. We 'll see what happens when he goes away."

Sonnenberg had no suspicion of the remarks which were being exchanged about him in the porter's lodge. He had entered the dining-room, where he found but one other guest, the same little old gentleman with the pleasant face who had been present when Dora and Fannie inquired at the hotel for Mrs. Brighton.

He sat before his half-bottle of wine at the upper end of the table and was chatting with the lively head-waiter, who, with his hands clasped behind him, stood at his side by the stove.

Sonnenberg cast a critical look around the room, which, though not large, was very comfortable.

"Can I have something warm for supper?" he asked, laying down his hat and cane and preparing to take off his overcoat. "I have just come from the theatre. It is rather late, to be sure, but—"

"Never mind, sir," the head-waiter interrupted him, brushing the crumbs from the table with his napkin. "You can have a beefsteak with poached eggs and fried potatoes."

"That will do very well," replied Sonnenberg. "And you may bring a bottle of Bordeaux."

"Medoc or St. Julien, sir?"

"St. Julien, if you please."

The head-waiter hastened from the room.

Theodor Sonnenberg seated himself at the table and fixed his dark, sparkling eyes upon the smooth-shaven, smiling face of the old gentleman.

"I suppose you live at this house?" he asked.

"No," was the answer. "I am only one of its regular frequenters. But I do not remember ever having had the pleasure of meeting you here before."

"This is, indeed, my first visit here," said Sonnen-

berg. "I happened to be passing, and I think I shall not regret having dropped in. This is a very pleasant dining-room."

"Yes, and everything you get here is excellent, as well as reasonable. The service, too, is very good. You will be sure to agree with me."

"We are proud of the good reputation of our house," said the head-waiter, who had returned in the meantime, and was opening the bottle of wine. "We have only pure wines, and our cooking is famous."

Sonnenberg raised the glass to his lips and tasted the wine with the air of a connoisseur, while the head-waiter watched him with a triumphant smile.

"Indeed, there is no need of praising this wine, for it praises itself; I shall certainly patronize this house. One can live in a large city a long time without discovering the good hotels in it," he continued, turning to the old gentleman, who nodded assent.

Sonnenberg now rose and walked about the room, examining the decorations of the walls.

There were framed pictures of large hotels, which invited the patronage of travellers; advertisements of dry-goods establishments, wine merchants and cigar dealers; a few old oil paintings, the colors of which were hardly distinguishable, busts of the sovereign and the heir-apparent, a pair of huge antlers and a stuffed eagle, a printed request to the guests of the house to place all articles of value in the landlord's keeping, as he could guarantee their safety only in that case; a few time-tables, whose soiled appearance gave proof of their having been well used; in short, a little of everything that could tend to give an air of comfort to a room of the kind.

"Near the door, so that it could not but catch the eye of every one who was about to leave the room, a

good-sized handbill hung upon the wall, which also attracted Sonnenberg's attention."

"Any person who can give information with regard to Mrs. Mary Brighton, of London, is requested to communicate with the landlord of this hotel," he read, in a low tone.

"What does that mean?" he asked, as he returned to his seat and cut off a piece of the bread which lay beside his plate.

"Can you, perhaps, give us the desired information? asked the head-waiter, quickly, and at this question the eye of the old gentleman rested, for a moment, penetratingly upon Sonnenberg's face.

"No, indeed; I never heard the name. But I have friends in London, and, if it is a matter of importance, I might make inquiries."

"The London police themselves know nothing about this lady. She is said to have lived in very reduced circumstances there."

"And may I ask why you wish to learn more about her?" inquired Sonnenberg, playing with the bread on the table.

"Well, the lady stayed at this house one day and then committed suicide."

"And had not paid her bill here, probably."

"On the contrary, she did not owe us a penny."

"Notwithstanding her reduced circumstances."

"We knew nothing about those at that time, sir. Enough, she asked for her bill and paid it before she left the hotel to go and jump into the river," said the head-waiter, serving the dishes which had been brought in the meantime.

"Well, then I don't quite see the use of that handbill," observed Sonnenberg. "This seems to be an excellent beefsteak. The lady can hardly have left anything very valuable."

"By no means, sir; there was nothing worth mentioning, and the police wish to have their expenses paid."

"Oh, that is the reason? They hope the poor lady's friends will be willing to pay them?"

"Yes; and there are other reasons which make it desirable to obtain more information regarding her."

Sonnenberg seemed to devote his attention exclusively to his supper, which he was evidently enjoying.

"Indeed?" he replied. "Of course such an event always leaves some mystery which one would like to have cleared," he continued, turning to the old gentleman. "Of course people would like to know, above all things, why the person committed suicide. Such disclosures are fine subjects for sensational newspaper articles, and the local reporters hunt up just that kind of events with a perseverance which would be worthy of a better cause. But did the unfortunate lady leave no papers?"

"Not a line, sir. We looked everywhere, but could find nothing."

"Then it will hardly be worth the trouble to investigate the matter any further," said Sonnenberg, with obvious indifference. "May I ask you for another bottle of this wine? I must compliment you on your cooking; it is as good as your Bordeaux."

The head-waiter bowed his thanks, put his napkin under his arm, and left the room.

"A curious idea to put up that handbill!" observed Sonnenberg, with a laugh. "I wonder if they really expect it to have any result?"

"Well," replied the old gentleman; "this hotel is frequented by people from all parts of the world, and it might happen—"

"If I were a traveller who had known that lady I

should certainly take no notice of that bill," said Sonnenberg, who had finished his supper. "The communications which the landlord asks for will not suffice. The authorities will make a note of everything, will ask a hundred questions which cannot be answered; in short, you expose yourself to endless trouble, which will cause you nothing but annoyance."

"One would almost think that you could give the desired information," said the old gentleman, in a tone that sounded half inquisitive and half jocular. "You had better tell what you know; I 'll promise you that you shall have no trouble about it."

"Are you a reporter, if I may ask?"

"God forbid! What an idea," cried the old gentleman, laughing.

"Well, I can assure you that I did not know that lady."

"But you take quite an interest in the matter, do you not?"

"Not that I know of."

"Don't deny it; every one is interested in it after reading the handbill."

"Then that is another reason for my calling it foolish to have it put up here. What is the use of the excitement it causes? Perhaps it was done to attract visitors."

"There I must contradict you, sir!" said the head-waiter, quickly, as he refilled his guest's glass. "We are not at all pleased with the many questions which are asked about that bill. And, besides, not a day passes but that it gives rise to low jokes, and when those occur too often, they become simply disgusting."

"Why don't you take down the bill then?"

"Pah! I am not allowed to do that."

"Ah, the police will not let you?"

"No, they wish to have it remain there."

"That is another thing," said Sonnenberg, who seized his glass just then, and, looking up, started when he saw the eyes of the old gentleman fixed upon him very gravely.

"I do not quite understand yet what your object is in having it there, and I can tell you beforehand that nothing will come of it. But as you attach so much importance to the matter, I will have it inquired into in London. I was going to write to-morrow, at any rate, to a friend who lives there, and there is no harm in asking."

"You see that I was right," said the old gentleman, facetiously. "You have become quite interested in the affair."

Sonnenberg hastily finished his bottle and looked at his watch.

"Nearly midnight, I must go! Pray, what do I owe you?" he asked the head-waiter, and then went on: "Well, such interest is but natural, my dear sir; no one passes a bill like that without reading it, and the curiosity which it awakens demands satisfaction."

"Just as I said; we shall all be very glad if your inquiries procure us that satisfaction. I suppose we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here again?"

"Probably," replied Sonnenberg, coolly, as he took out his purse and paid the amount of his bill. "Will I always find company here?"

"Every evening, sir!" replied the head-waiter. "We have quite a number of regular customers. Many thanks!"

He put the fee which he had received into his vest-pocket, and assisted his guest in putting on his overcoat; then he accompanied him to the door, where he dismissed him with a low bow.

CHAPTER XI.

ON A SECRET MISSION.

The old gentleman looked for a while thoughtfully at the door through which Sonnenberg had made his exit. Then he slowly drained his glass.

"Is this really the first time he has been here?" he asked, in a subdued voice. "Do you not know him at all?"

"No, sir," replied the head-waiter, taking from the cupboard under his writing-desk a square bottle, which he placed upon the table, together with a *carafe* of water and two tumblers. "I have never seen him before. Do you think he came here only on account of that handbill?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied the old gentleman. "I suppose I need not remind you that you have promised me the greatest secrecy?" he continued; and there was a grave, stern expression in the look which he fixed upon his companion.

"Certainly not, Herr Martin. I know very well how important you consider this matter. You may be mistaken, but it will be through no fault of mine if you are disappointed in your hopes."

'I have rarely, if ever, been mistaken in such things," replied Martin, twirling his snuff-box. "And I do not expect to find myself so in this case. I told you at

the time that there was something else than suicide at the bottom of this affair. We could find no motive for that suicide, and that made it all the more surprising that the lady had left no explanation of her deed. I can assure you that when a woman of refinement, such as she seemed to have been, wants to kill herself, it is not a matter of indifference to her what becomes of her body. She will make arrangements which render its speedy discovery and identification possible; and in this case nothing of the kind had been done."

"Nothing, indeed," replied the head-waiter, reflectively, as he mixed some grog and pushed a glass of it toward the old gentleman. "But it may be that the lady wished to have her death looked upon as an accident."

"That wish would be entertained only by persons who had left a family, or at least friends, whose opinion they valued, and not a relative or friend of Mrs. Brighton's has turned up since her death. And then, do you remember that handsome lady who came here to see the Englishwoman on the morning of the occurrence, and complained that the latter had stared at her the night before in such a conspicuous manner? Unfortunately, no one thought of asking that lady's name, because the police, from the first, did not attach sufficient importance to the matter."

"But nothing more was discovered later, either—"

"Excuse me; you know I am of a different opinion. To be sure, the physician made very little of the apparently insignificant wound on the head, and the examination itself was conducted quite superficially. It is always so in such cases. Where there is no plaintiff there is no judge, and those medical gentlemen have enough to do without sifting the matter to the bottom. If they find no proofs which are distinctly evident, they

prefer to ignore what is unimportant, and, on the whole, I can't blame them for it. I repeat that I felt convinced from the first that a crime had been committed, and I have set myself the task of bringing it to light. Please give me some more sugar. You know I like my grog sweet."

"You will remember, sir, that I offered you my services at once."

"So you did, and it was for my interest to accept your offer. I can do nothing openly, for the police did not share my opinion. It would not do either to let the murderer suspect that we are looking for him, for fear of his escaping us. For that reason I advised putting up that handbill, and expressed my conviction, even at that time, that the guilty party would come here to make inquiries as to what effects had been left by the deceased. He would come all the sooner if he heard of the handbill, and as he would necessarily be interested in everything that occurred here, it was to be presumed that he would hear of it."

"And now you think you are sure of him?" asked the head-waiter, stirring his grog.

"No, I don't think that; but I do think that that gentleman knows more about the matter than he is willing to tell. That was evident to me from everything he said, and now that I have got so far I mean to learn more. I could not sound him any further to-day—it wouldn't do to precipitate matters, you know; but he 'll be sure to come back to tell us what he has heard from London."

"And what do you think he will have to tell, sir?"

"Some story by which he will hope to do away with all interest in Mrs. Brighton. He may say that she had committed some crime in England and had been obliged to fly in consequence, or that she was a woman

without any means of support. At any rate, he will come to make some communication of the kind to us, and then I shall hope to learn his name."

"But it may be a long time before that happens."

"Then I shall have to wait patiently as I have been obliged to do so often in my life," replied the old gentleman, shrugging his shoulders. "He may come at some time when I am not here. In that case do not tell him who I am; tell him nothing but that I 'm a retired business-man, living on his income, who has taken his meals at this house for years, and drinks his half-bottle of wine here every evening."

"And that is partly true, sir."

"Certainly; but it may not satisfy him."

"Well, he will not hear anything from me. Another glass, sir?"

"No, I thank you," said Martin, pocketing his snuff-box and rising from his chair; "it is very late. Don't charge more to my weekly account than I have really had," he continued, facetiously. "You know I have a good memory."

"Unfortuntely!" replied the head-waiter, in a similar tone. "It is impossible to make anything on you, sir! Perhaps that gentleman will come here regularly now, too?"

"I hardly think so, and, indeed, it would not be desirable. People whom we see every day can evade observation much more easily than those whom we meet only occasionally. And besides, it is not probable that he will feel very comfortable here; he will soon discover that he is being watched; a man with an evil conscience has sharp eyes. Well, once more, don't let out anything; keep your ears open and your mouth shut. Good night!"

With this the old gentleman slowly left the room,

The porter stood in the door of his lodge waiting for the departure of the last guest, in order to lock the house-door.

"You will not be sorry that I am going at last," said Herr Martin, jovially.

"I 'm used to it," replied the porter, "and I don't mind waiting for you, sir."

"By the way, do you know the gentleman who was here a while ago?"

"Not personally."

"Not even by name? You meet so many people."

"I never saw him here before to-night; but I happened to have a friend with me, when he came, who knows him."

"A friend whose veracity you can depend on?"

"Certainly! He used to be janitor at Herr Roland's."

"At the banker's? Indeed? And did he happen to tell you that gentleman's name?"

"Yes, sir; his name is Sonnenberg, and he is very intimate with the Rolands; never gives any tips, but would take them himself if they were offered to him."

"I suppose he did not give you any either?" inquired Martin, with a laugh.

"No, but as I was prepared for that, it did not trouble me."

"Well, I don't think he is quite as bad as your friend makes him out to be; he gave the head-waiter quite a generous fee."

"Yes, the head-waiters always skim the fat off the soup; but that can't be helped. Good night, sir!"

The old gentleman nodded pleasantly and passed out. He walked, with quick steps, through several streets, until he reached a small house, in one of the upper windows of which there was a light. He entered and was ascending the stairs, when a door opened above

and his old housekeeper came to meet him with a light.

"This has come for you, sir!" she said, handing him a letter as he entered his sitting-room. "I think it is from Lawyer Kerner."

Martin opened the note, which contained only a few lines:

"MY DEAR MARTIN:

"Please come to my office punctually at noon to-morrow for an important consultation. Unless you are otherwise engaged, I should like to have you make your preparations for a trip to London, starting to-morrow, if possible.

"Yours sincerely, WALTER KERNER."

The old gentleman replaced the letter in its envelope and sat for some minutes lost in thought.

"On the whole, this just suits me," he muttered. "I can make my inquiries on the spot. Well, Hanna, I'm going to bed," he said, rising. "I may have to go out of town to-morrow for a few days. See that my valise is packed."

With this he took the candle, which he had lighted as he spoke, and withdrew to his bedroom.

On the stroke of twelve the next day he entered Doctor Kerner's private office.

"Punctual as ever," said the lawyer, rising and shaking hands with him. "Can you take that trip?"

"Yes, as I have nothing on hand just now which could prevent me."

"So much the better. Sit down. We will have to wait for the lady by whose order you are to go to London."

He had hardly spoken these words when the door opened and Dora entered.

For some minutes she and Martin stood face to face in silence. They both at once remembered their former meeting.

"Herr Peter Martin, secret official of the criminal

police—Frau Dora Winkler!" said the lawyer, introducing them to each other. "You seem to be acquainted, however?"

"Yes, by sight," replied Dora, as she took a seat and signed to the official to do likewise.

"Did you have any suspicion, sir, when you came to the Black Eagle that day to make inquiries about Mrs. Brighton, that there had been foul play?"

"May I ask you whether you had any?"

"I did. It took possession of my mind as soon as I heard that the poor woman's body had been found in the river."

"And whom did you suspect?"

"May I speak without reserve?"

"Certainly. You can confide any secret to me. My official position is a guarantee of my discretion."

"Very well, then. My suspicions rested upon the gentleman who sat beside me the evening before in the box at the theatre. He denied all acquaintance with the lady, indeed, but it is my conviction that he will not hesitate at a lie if it is to his interest to conceal the truth."

"And his name?"

"Is Theodor Sonnenberg."

"I guessed as much," replied the old gentleman. "I knew that he had some object in coming to the Black Eagle last night."

Dora's eyes flashed.

"I am glad to find some one at last who shares my suspicions," she said, with a significant glance at the lawyer. "We know already that Sonnenberg spent some time in England; but we might find out what he did there and what kind of a record he left. It is for this reason that I wish you to go over there and make inquiries about him."

"I am ready to do so; but if I am to realize fully the hopes which, as I suppose, you build on the result of my mission, I must ask you to enlighten me as to the interest which this matter has for you."

"I have written down some memoranda on the subject for you," said Doctor Kerner, handing him a paper. "They will give you all the necessary information, and you can study them on your journey."

"I am very glad of that," replied Martin. "If you will permit me, madam, I will just look them over."

"Do so, I beg of you, sir," said Dora. Then, turning to the lawyer, she asked him some questions in a low voice.

The detective had soon finished his perusal of the document. He folded it, put it in his pocket, and then noisily took a pinch of snuff, as if to show that he was ready to continue the conversation.

"Have you anything more to ask?" inquired Doctor Kerner. "Is there any point that is not quite clear to you?"

"I should like to inquire whether any discovery has been made with regard to the robbery at Herr Roland's which might serve to confirm your suspicions against Sonnenberg?"

"I am sorry to say there is not."

"Then Dornberg will be convicted?"

"I fear so, unless I succeed in convincing the jury by my defense."

"Then it would be foolish to commence with the pursuit of the matter; we shall have to look for the beginning in London," said the old gentleman, decidedly.

"I agree with you," remarked Dora. "When we have discovered the proofs that he is not as innocent of Mrs. Brighton's death as he pretends to be, we shall be able to give free utterance to our suspicions with regard to

the robbery. Did you meet him last night at the Black Eagle?"

"Yes, he came in late, after the theatre; it was the first time he had ever been there. And he will come again. The handbill which was put up in the dining-room there, and which asks for information about Mrs. Brighton, troubled him. I should like to ask a few more questions, madam, concerning that evening at the opera. When did you notice the lady's strange behavior?"

"During the first act."

"And Sonnenberg was sitting beside you? Did you direct his attention to it?"

"Certainly. He took my opera-glass, looked at the lady through it for a while, and then declared that he did not know her."

"Did you notice no agitation, no alarm in his features?"

"No, but I took no particular notice at the time; you know I had no idea of the importance which it might have for the future that I should watch the expression of his face."

"But do you not think that any agitation on his part would have struck you?"

"Certainly, for I remember distinctly that his indifference surprised me."

"And it would have been impossible for him to assume that indifference if the presence of the lady had been unexpected to him. He must have seen her before. But when and where? He himself had not been at the Black Eagle, and the lady—but stop; I remember she had gone out the night before and had come home very late. Do you remember anything about that evening? Were you at the theatre then, too? And was Herr Sonnenberg with you?"

"No. That night Sonnenberg called on me about dusk," replied Dora, "and soon left again. She may have gone to him at his rooms."

"Possibly; but I can make no inquiries there yet, without running the risk of his escaping me. The inquest did not show that a murder had been committed."

"Were you present?" asked the lawyer. "Did the doctor express no suspicion? Did he not allude to the possibility of foul play?"

"No," replied Martin; "and if, notwithstanding, I thought at once that a crime might have been committed, the reason lay in other causes of suspicion of which the physician knew nothing and which the police, possibly, might not have considered of any account. You say, madam, that you read hatred, anger and despair in the lady's face?"

"Yes; but hatred predominated."

"And you could not have been the object of that hatred, as the lady did not know you. Did you not at once connect it with Herr Sonnenberg?"

"To be sure I did. I told myself that that hatred, which was probably founded on jealousy, could be meant for him alone; but, as I said before, I attached no importance to the matter."

"And, when the performance was over, did Sonnenberg accompany you home?"

"Only to the carriage."

"No farther?"

"No; there was no need of it, as my companion was with me."

"As I observe from Doctor Kerner's memoranda, you have reason to suspect that companion of being in league with Sonnenberg and aware of his plans," continued Martin, after making some entries in

his note-book. "When did you make that discovery?"

"Not until Fräulein Dornberg directed my attention to it. My servant has never trusted him, and often warned me against her. I found such antipathy, which was mutual between her and Frau Hennig, very natural. But I have heard now that my companion has secret interviews with Sonnenberg, and I am planning to surprise them on one of these occasions."

"Don't do that, by any means!" cried the old gentleman. "Don't let them see that you mistrust them. Sonnenberg's visit to the Black Eagle shows that he feels the ground tottering under his feet. He would leave town at once if he arrived at the conviction that his hopes of your hand and your fortune would be frustrated by your suspicions. Your companion's name is?"

"Ernestine Hennig."

"How did you obtain her?"

"Through the papers. When I became engaged to Gustav Dornberg I thought best to engage a companion. I advertised in several of the papers, and of all the answers which I received I liked hers the best. She was a widow and had been unhappily married, like myself. Her letter was full of warmth and feeling, and, when I made her personal acquaintance, I felt strongly drawn to her."

"An experienced hypocrite could have no difficulty in deceiving you," remarked the lawyer, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Did you know Sonnenberg when you engaged this woman?"

"No; I only made his acquaintance a few months later."

"Through Frau Hennig?"

"I first met him at the Rolands'."

"And Frau Hennig, I suppose, at once recognized all his good qualities and sang his praises?"

"By no means. She was always very cool and reserved toward him."

"And is she so still when you are present?"

"Certainly!"

"Then that is a farther proof of hypocrisy and calculation on her part," said the old gentleman, closing his note-book. "Well, I know enough for the present, and will start on my journey to-night. I shall reach London early day after to-morrow. As an official I can count on energetic assistance, and hope soon to obtain the most explicit information with regard to Mrs. Brighton. Her acquaintance with Sonnenberg must have begun there. We know already that he spent some time in England."

"And when you have made a discovery of any importance, will you do me the favor of telegraphing to me at once?" asked Dora.

"With pleasure; but, to avoid all risks, I shall address the dispatch to Doctor Kerner."

"Just as you please. It might be that such a message would have some influence on Dornberg's case."

"Do not entertain any hope like that," said Martin, gravely, "for I do not consider its fulfillment at all probable. Even if I should discover in London that Sonnenberg knew Mrs. Brighton, that would furnish no proof of the crime which we suspect him to have committed here, and we cannot be sure that we ever shall find such a proof. Do not rejoice too soon; not even if you receive an encouraging message from me. I am convinced, even now, that there will be much hard work awaiting me on my return."

"Cannot I relieve you of some of it?" asked Dora.

"Perhaps so. You might, in the meantime, make

more particular inquiries as to the former life and the family relations of your companion; but be very careful not to betray any distrust or suspicion. All our efforts might be rendered useless thereby. Do your best to appear careless and indifferent—diamond cut diamond, you know. If all goes well, I hope to return in the course of next week, and I hope that we will then have secured a firmer foundation, upon which we can continue to build."

Dora took several banknotes from her purse and handed them to the official.

"Will that cover your expenses?" she asked.

"I do not think I shall need the whole," he replied. "And I must ask you to excuse me now; I have still some necessary preparations to make. Remember: Caution and discretion. Good-by!"

And with this he hastened from the room.

"We must await the result of his mission with patience," said the lawyer, as Dora likewise was preparing to leave. "If this mystery can be solved, that man will accomplish it."

"I only wish we had applied to him sooner!"

"It is not yet too late. I must confess to you frankly that I was not at all inclined to call upon him. I do not like such crooked ways. If Sonnenberg discovers that we are employing this man, he will leave at once, provided he is guilty."

"And do you not yet believe in his guilt?"

"No; but I think we are following in this case, as well, a wrong track, which will only lead us farther away from our aim."

"Then you must believe that Gustav is guilty," said Dora, indignantly, while an angry glance flashed upon him from her blue eyes. "There is no other choice left you. If Sonnenberg did not commit the robbery—"

"Then a third party may have done so," the lawyer interrupted her. "I have my own ideas with regard to that third party; but I cannot give words to them yet."

Dora looked at him keenly for a few moments, but as she discovered in his face no inclination to make any further disclosures, she shook her head incredulously, and said:

"I cannot imagine where you are going to look for the person in question. Can you not tell me anything more?"

"Do not urge me. I wish to keep the matter secret for the present, because I am convinced that no one would enter into my suspicions."

"And if Gustav it convicted?"

"It will not follow, even then, that all is lost; his sentence can be revoked; and you may depend upon it that his conviction will not discourage me."

"But he will be crushed and reduced to despair by it," replied Dora, with a heavy sigh.

"You need not fear that either. I shall see him at once and tell him what I intend to do, and I am convinced that hope and courage will take possession of his soul once more. I fear that we have clung too firmly to the suspicion that Sonnenberg may have done the deed. It is only within the last few days that this has become apparent to me."

"But Herr Martin, who has grown gray in his profession, suspects the same."

"Excuse me. We have not yet talked with him about the robbery, and Mrs. Brighton's sudden death may have nothing whatever to do with that. If Sonnenberg were in possession of those two hundred thousand thalers he would care very little about your hand and your fortune, and it is presumed he would have

left town long ere this in that case. Did that never strike you?"

"If he had left town, would not suspicion have fallen upon him at once? Would not the fear of that possibility have detained him here?"

"He might easily have found some pretext to explain the necessity for his departure."

"He probably fears—"

"No, no; if that were the case, he certainly would not have made those inquiries at the Black Eagle last night. Nothing but the hope of securing your fortune keeps him here, and he would give up that hope at once if he had all that money in his possession."

"Can you not give me a hint, doctor, whom you suspect now?"

"If I did you would probably laugh at me."

"No, indeed!"

"Or else you would not believe me," he replied. "Have patience, my dear madam, and rest reassured that I am privately working indefatigably to throw light into this mysterious darkness."

She looked at him archly.

"I know that I can trust you," she said, smiling; "for you are doing it to please some one else, too."

At the first moment he cast down his eyes and adjusted his spectacles in evident embarrassment.

"Who told you that?" he asked in a low tone.

"My own eyes, which never deceive me in such cases," she replied facetiously.

"And if it were really so?"

"Then you would be sure of my sincere sympathy. And if I can be of any assistance to you, do not hesitate to call upon me."

"Thank you. Have you spoken to her on the subject?"

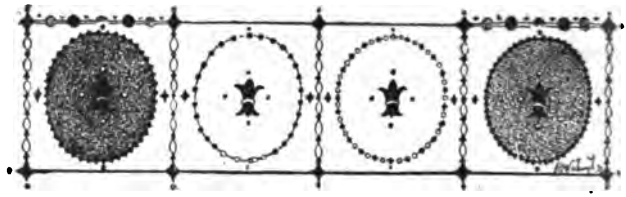
"No, and I advise you not to do so, either, as long as this heavy burden is resting upon her, which deadens her to any feeling of joy and happiness."

"You are right," he replied, taking the hand which she extended to him in farewell. "I beg of you to keep my secret until I have accomplished what I am exerting all my powers to do, and that burden is lifted from her."

He raised her hand to his lips and, when she had bidden him good-by, softly closed the door behind her.

"Patience!" he muttered to himself, as he mechanically arranged the papers on his writing-desk. "I shall now follow the other track, from which I expect far better results than from this journey to London."

Some minutes later he too left the house in order to go to the hotel where he took his dinner.



CHAPTER XII.

THE VERDICT.

The day of Gustav Dornberg's trial had come.

It was not with the calm confidence of an innocent man that he appeared in court. He knew only too well that all the evidence was against him and that the weight of that terrible accusation must crush him.

He knew that this day would rob him of his honor and his life's happiness; and he felt incensed that he, who had been guilty of no wrong, should be forced to succumb in this conflict with an unjust fate.

His excitement and his exasperation manifested themselves even in his answers to the presiding judge. They made an unfavorable impression upon the jury, and subsequently furnished the attorney-general with an argument in favor of conviction.

The bill of indictment, indeed, was based only on circumstantial evidence, but it was very skillfully drawn up. Setting aside the fact that the stolen money had not been recovered, not one link was missing in the chain of evidence.

And even for the disappearance of the money the prosecution had found an explanation which it desig-

nated as indubitably correct. The accused had either concealed the bills in some safe place, where he could find them after the expiration of his term of punishment, or he had destroyed them, in order to revenge himself on the connections of his betrothed.

With head erect and eyes flashing with anger, Dornberg repudiated this charge. Highly incensed at being obliged to describe his relations with Dora thus publicly, he explained, with a trembling voice, the reasons for his late visit to the bank and his departure from town soon after.

He denounced it as folly to look upon these circumstances as proofs of his guilt, particularly as he had done nothing to conceal his flight or to mislead those who might pursue him.

The assertion of the prosecution that he had concealed or even destroyed the stolen money, called forth such sarcastic comments on his part that the presiding judge reproved him severely, and at the close of his explanations he indulged in the bitterest reproaches against the brother of his betrothed, as well as his connections by marriage, whose intrigues alone, in his opinion, had led to this unjust accusation against him.

In vain had his counsel warned him against such passionate outbreaks. Gustav did not heed the reproachful glances of his friendly adviser. The indignation which had accumulated within him during his solitary confinement prior to the trial had to find vent at last, no matter what might come of it.

And this passionate excitement unfortunately prejudiced the jury against him from the first. They saw in those vehement invectives, which were directed partly against the attorney-general, partly against the witnesses, nothing but an attempt to influence their

judgment, and thus his cause was lost even before it had begun.

The examination of the witnesses occupied several hours. Their testimony only served to confirm the charge.

The attorney-general concluded his very able summing-up with the assertion that, from whatever point of view the case be looked at, and however closely every *pro* and *contra* be examined, the only conclusion which could be reached was that no one but the accused could have committed the deed.

As he closed his speech, the faces of the jury plainly showed that he had convinced them.

And their conviction was not shaken by the argument of the counsel for the defendant, in spite of his warm, impressive eloquence.

It was an old and well-known trick to refer to the youth and the excellent reputation of the accused! And even though the counsel for the prisoner attacked and attempted to refute every proof, he could not do away with the evidence, and all that he said with regard to the prisoner's state of mind after the rupture of his engagement made no impression on the jury in view of the attorney-general's speech; they only laughed at it.

Doctor Kerner had spoken long and earnestly; his arguments raised some doubts in the mind of his hearers, but the cutting reply of the attorney-general dispelled them again.

It was already dusk when the jury retired, and they arrived at a decision sooner than even the attorney-general had expected.

The verdict which they returned was "guilty," but with a recommendation to mercy on account of extenuating circumstances.

The court, after a long consultation, condemned the accused to imprisonment for three years and deprivation of his civil rights, and, when the sentence had been passed, the presiding judge once more asked the prisoner if he was ready now to confess his guilt, and, in case the money was still in existence, to designate the place where it was concealed.

Gustav's face had turned pale as death. He passed his burning eyes slowly over the jury and the witnesses, and then fixed them upon the judge.

"I have nothing to confess!" he replied in a firm voice. "Whatever you may think of me, I swear before the face of the Almighty, who is looking down upon us, that I am innocent!"

The court withdrew, the jury departed with the satisfying consciousness of having done their duty and rendered a dangerous member of human society harmless for some time. The witnesses and the public also left the court-room.

Gustav looked after them fixedly as he stood, drawn up to his full height and guarded by two constables, behind the iron railing which enclosed the prisoner's bench.

In front of this bench stood the table of his counsel, who, with clouded brow, was tying up his documents.

"And so all is over now?" said Gustav, with a heavy sigh, passing his hand slowly over his eyes.

"That might be the case if you had no friends," replied the lawyer, turning to him. "As long as they remain to you, you have no reason to despair. But why did you not heed my warning? By your vehemence you spoilt everything. It is an entirely wrong principle to try to influence the jury before they have had time to form an opinion of their own. Such an opinion may be called in question later on, but it should never be forestalled."

"Pardon me, I had no intention of doing that; I merely gave a loose rein to the resentment which was burning within me," answered Gustav, bitterly. "As the witnesses were summoned, I saw those once more to whose malicious intrigues I owe the loss of my life's happiness, of my honor and my liberty, and I could not control the storm which arose within me."

"You now see the consequences," said Kerner, regretfully. "I did everything in my power—"

"I am convinced of that, and thank you for it with all my heart!"

"I shall now petition for a reversal of judgment."

"I doubt whether you will succeed."

"No matter; we shall gain time in that way, at least. We have not yet reached the end. Your friends will remain active, let that console and encourage you. Hitherto, unfortunately, only a wrong track has been followed; but I believe that I have found a better one now. I will call on you to-morrow to talk the matter over."

"Will you tell me then, too, how the verdict has been received by those who are nearest to me?" asked Gustav, in an unsteady voice.

"I can set your mind at rest on that point even now. It will not shake their faith in your innocence."

"Not even that of her whose opinion I value more than any other?"

"Not even hers."

"Are you perfectly sure that she believes in me?" asked Gustav, a ray of joy lighting up his eyes.

"Perfectly," replied the lawyer; "and, what is more, I have been commissioned to tell you so."

"A thousand thanks! With that encouraging certainty I can bear everything patiently. Will you tell her that?"

"I will do so this very day; you may depend upon it."

"But what if all efforts should prove vain, and I should have to undergo the sentence pronounced upon me?"

"Hope on, and don't lose courage," replied Doctor Kerner, as he placed his documents under his arm. "The constables are becoming impatient; we must say good-by. Would you not like to see some of your friends? For now, after your conviction, there will be no difficulty in obtaining permission for them to visit you."

"I should like to see my sister Fannie."

"Not Frau Winkler?"

"No, not in prison. It would be too trying for both of us."

The constables had drawn nearer. Doctor Kerner nodded, as if to signify that he agreed with Dornberg's remark; then he took leave of the prisoner with a warm pressure of the hand.

"You shall see your sister," he said. "And don't forget what I told you."

The gas was lit in the passages of the court-house when the lawyer, his bundle of documents under his arm, descended the stairs.

A short distance in front of him he saw three gentlemen whom he at one recognized—Roland, Sonnenberg and Councillor Heppner. They had acted as witnesses in the trial and were now engaged in lively conversation.

Quite unintentionally, he had soon drawn so near, unobserved by them, that he could understand their words distinctly.

"You had better bring matters to an end without further delay," said Roland, who seemed greatly excited. "Now that the fellow is convicted, Dora can no longer doubt his guilt. And you, Heinrich, ought to make her understand that she owes it to her reputa-

tion to contract this engagement, as that is the only way of silencing all the disagreeable remarks that are being made about her."

"That can't be done in a hurry,'" replied the councillor.

"My wife wishes it, and she also wants the matter settled before we leave."

"Well, well, you're not going to London immediately?"

"Certainly, within a fortnight, at the latest," replied Roland.

"But why are you in such a hurry? You will have to settle up your affairs here before you go."

"I'll leave that to you. We have decided not to wait any longer."

At that moment Sonnenberg happened to turn around, and Doctor Kerner could no longer listen, but was obliged to pass the three gentlemen, who returned his cool bow so civilly that it surprised him.

He heard them burst out laughing behind him. Probably they were ridiculing his vain effort to convince the jury of Dornberg's innocence.

"You may laugh as much as you like," he muttered. "We'll wait and see who will be the last to laugh. Perhaps you would not be so hilarious now if you could read my thoughts. So that bankrupt and his wife are going to London? And in a fortnight, at the latest? I'm glad that I have learned that; it is only an additional proof that I am on the right track now."

He hastened on his way and soon reached his office.

His chief clerk came to meet him with a telegram, which had arrived shortly before. He took it to his office, seated himself at his desk, and opened it.

"Certain proofs discovered," he read. "Shall start day after to-morrow. "MARTIN."

The lawyer leaned his head on his hand and lost himself in thought.

"Certain proofs," he said to himself. "H–m! Martin would not say so, if it were not true. But to what do these proofs relate? Probably merely to Mrs. Brighton, and my own surmises and suspicions will not be altered by them."

He took a sheet of note-paper and wrote as follows:

"DEAR MADAM:

"As was to be expected, the jury have allowed themselves to be convinced by the evidence against Herr Dornberg. But from another quarter I have received news that promises well. According to our agreement, I shall expect you at the appointed place and hour. Your obedient servant,

"WALTER KERNER."

He addressed the note to Frau Dora Winkler and rang the bell.

"A secret message," he said to the clerk who entered the office. "Will you have the kindness to attend to it personally and at once? Take it to the address given. An old servant will open the door for you; give her the note with the brief remark that it is the jeweler's bill, which madam had asked for. The letter will then reach the right hands. Follow my directions in all particulars and, above all, don't answer any questions."

The clerk nodded silently and put the note in his pocket. A few minutes later he left the house.

He found Dora's residence without trouble and, as Doctor Kerner had foreseen, old Katherine opened the door for him.

She seemed to be expecting the letter; she received it in silence, and, when the messenger had left, she went to her mistress in the boudoir.

Dora, who was restlessly pacing to and fro on the thick carpet, came to meet her and took the letter from her hand.

"From whom?" she asked, so coolly and indifferently that Ernestine, who sat near her, engaged in some fancy-work, did not suspect anything.

"The jeweler's bill!" replied the servant, with like indifference.

"Oh, yes, I had asked him to send it!" said Dora, as she opened the envelope, and cast a brief, scrutinizing glance at the contents of the note.

Ernestine watched her closely. She saw her lovely face flush suddenly and as quickly turn pale again. Nor did a slight quivering of Dora's firmly closed lips escape her keen observation.

"Higher than I expected," remarked Frau Winkler, with apparent composure, as she put the letter in her pocket. "Has the carriage been ordered?" she continued, turning to the servant, who was still standing by the door and watching Ernestine as closely as the latter had watched her mistress.

"A carriage?" asked Ernestine, in astonishment. "I have heard nothing about that."

"Why, have I not said that I was going out at eight o'clock?"

"Not a word," replied Ernestine, and her keen glance seemed to be trying to penetrate Dora's most secret thoughts. "Nor was I aware that we had accepted any invitation for this evening."

"Nevertheless, I am going out," Dora interrupted her, signing to Katherine to leave the room. "I wonder if the trial is not over yet!"

"Probably not. You know Herr Sonnenberg promised to inform you of the verdict at once."

"Perhaps the news is so bad that he does not wish to bring it," said Dora, seating herself on the sofa.

"He will remember that you must be prepared for the worst. Frankly, Dora, I cannot understand your

excitement. That man who will go to the penitentiary to-day can no longer be anything to you. I should find it more natural if his fate were utterly indifferent to you."

Dora's brown eyes flashed with indignation; an impetuous answer was upon her lips. She restrained it, but it was extremely difficult for her to control herself. It irritated her beyond measure to think that that woman, who sat opposite her, so cold and devoid of sympathy, was secretly rejoicing in the expectation of learning the fate which, as she knew through Doctor Kerner, had already befallen her beloved.

But, hard as the task may be, she must act her part to the end, and she still had the hope that the hour of reckoning and of retribution would come for the really guilty in their turn.

"I wonder if you have ever known what real love is?" she asked, after a pause, and in a tone of cutting irony.

Ernestine dropped her thin hands, with her work, into her lap. Her lips wore a scornful expression.

"I think I have," she replied; "for I married my late husband for love alone."

"I never should have supposed so from what you have told me about him."

"When I discovered, soon after my marriage, that he was not worthy of my love, and when, in addition to that, he forfeited even my esteem by his low habits—"

"That would have been impossible if you had truly loved him," said Dora, interrupting her. "In that case you would have pitied him, borne with his faults and had patience with him. True love can excuse and forgive everything."

"Did you excuse and forgive your husband's faults and weaknesses?"

"Have I ever asserted that I married him for love? You know the history of my engagement to him and my unhappy marriage. How, then, can you ask such a question? I merely wished to say that if you had ever experienced the real sentiment, you would understand that I can neither forget Gustav nor cease to love him."

"Not even when he is in the penitentiary?"

Dora turned away. The scornful tone of these words sent a flush to her face.

"I still hope that matters will not go as far as that," she said, evading a direct answer. "What is it that Hamlet says? 'Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping.'"

"A well-turned phrase, nothing else," replied Ernestine, with a shrug of the shoulders. "And, besides, he would hardly count the penitentiary as a whipping. Ah, at last!"

She had recognized Sonnenberg's knock at the door. A moment later he entered the room.

He approached Dora with a low bow and raised her hand to his lips.

"I regret that I have no good news for you," he said, in a dejected tone. "In spite of the earnest and admirable defense, the jury have declared Gustav Dornberg guilty."

"He has been sentenced?" asked Dora, gazing at him fixedly.

"To imprisonment for three years and the loss of his civil rights."

"Very lenient," remarked Ernestine, with a sneer. "I had supposed that he would be sent to the penitentiary."

"The jury found extenuating circumstances in his favor."

"And do you also believe him guilty now?" asked Dora, her burning eyes still fixed upon him.

"I am sorry to be obliged to confess that I am convinced of the justice of the verdict," he replied, in a tone of cordial sympathy. "The testimony was truly overwhelming, and even the ablest of counsels could not have struggled successfully against the convincing power of the bill of indictment. Moreover, Dornberg personally made the impression of a man who is conscious of his guilt and rests his last hope on stubborn denial. His declarations sounded improbable throughout, and, in making them, he indulged in such violent invective and abuse against your connections that the presiding judge was obliged to call him to order."

"That was to be expected," remarked Ernestine, with a quick, furtive glance at Dora, who was apparently occupied solely with her thoughts. "He behaved in the same way here on that last evening. I have never doubted his guilt, but I have not worked against him either. He cannot accuse me of intrigue."

"But I did doubt his guilt," said Sonnenburg. "It was impossible for me to believe that a man who possessed the supreme happiness of being beloved by you, madam, could be capable of so low and dishonorable a crime. For, even though you had given him back his word, you would have forgiven him everything, if he had asked your pardon the following day. I know you well enough to be sure of that, and he could be sure of it, too. Therefore, it was an utterly incomprehensible piece of folly on his part to commit that robbery and leave town that very night."

"Folly!" said Ernestine, scornfully. "What did he care for Dora's love? Money, money, money—that was all he desired; and when his engagement was broken, and he saw that his hopes were vain in that quarter, he

tried to reach his aim in some other way. . That is the most plausible explanation of his conduct, and I only wonder that it was not accepted from the first. And it is on account of such a man that people are slandering your good name."

"I have not yet discovered that they are troubling themselves about me," replied Dora, her lip curling contemptuously.

"And yet it is so, my dear madam," said Sonnenberg, gravely. "Unfortunately Frau Hennig has told the truth. It is said that you are still engaged to Dornberg, and that you do not show any regret for the loss which Roland has sustained."

"Who dares say that?" cried Dora, indignantly.

"Who?" sneered Ernestine. "No one knows how such rumors originate, and yet they pass from mouth to mouth. I should not be in the least surprised if it were reported that you know perfectly well where the money is hidden."

"Ernestine!" cried Dora, indignantly.

"You go too far!" said Sonnenberg, in a tone of displeasure. "No one can cast such a suspicion on Frau Winkler."

"And if they did, could I not silence those insolent slanderers?" asked Dora.

"H-m, there might be a way of doing so!" rejoined Ernestine, deliberately; but a threatening glance from Dora caused her to break off in the middle of her sentence.

"There is but one way," remarked Sonnenberg, "and that would be for you to give some man the right to defend your honor with his own life. How inexpressibly happy would such a man deem himself."

Never had Dora so despised and abhorred the man who sat beside her as at that moment! She could

hardly refrain from starting up and showing him the door; but she dared not do it; the time of reckoning had not yet come.

"How can I think of such a thing at present?" she said, with forced composure, while she lowered her eyes, as if she feared to meet the burning, passionate gaze which was fixed upon her. "No, Ernestine; I cannot make up my mind to any step of the kind now; possibly I may consider the matter at some future time, when the events of the day have been somewhat forgotten."

"The sooner you do so the better it will be for you," observed Ernestine, in her cool, measured manner.

Dora replied to this remark merely by a wave of her hand, indicating thereby that she wished the subject dismissed.

"Can nothing more be done for that unhappy man?" she asked, turning to Sonnenberg.

"Nothing," he replied. "Possibly his counsel will move for a new trial, but I doubt whether the Supreme Court will consent."

"Did you see Colonel von Wartenfels in court?"

"No."

"Were any of Dornberg's family present?"

"Not one," replied Sonnenberg. "If I am rightly informed, Dornberg expressed the wish that they should not be there, as it would be too painful to him to meet them on that occasion."

"Very naturally," said Ernestine. "It would have been too mortifying to have them witness his disgrace."

Again Dora's beautiful eyes were turned on her indignantly; but they no longer intimidated her, as was proved by the expression of malicious triumph which played around the sharply defined corners of her mouth.

Dora had risen from her seat. She held her hand to her forehead as if it pained her.

"I hope you will excuse me," she said, in a weak voice, "if I say frankly that I should prefer to be alone for a while. The destruction of my last hope has affected my nerves more than—"

"I beg a thousand pardons," Sonnenberg quickly interrupted her, "for having troubled you so long. I had no idea that you were suffering. May I have the honor of calling again to-morrow?"

"You will be welcome," said Dora, with a faint smile, giving him her hand in farewell.

Under the pretext that Katherine had probably gone to order the carriage, Ernestine accompanied him into the hall.

"I must speak to you to-night," she said, in a low tone; "there will be a good opportunity. Dora is going out at eight o'clock, and then I will send the servant on an errand, so you need not fear to come."

"Yes, and I want to know, too, what I have to expect," replied Sonnenberg, as he put on his overcoat and gave her an expressive look. "I have no notion of waiting any longer."

"That is just what I want to consult you about. I shall expect you."

He went out and she returned to the boudoir, in order to resume her interrupted work, while Dora paced slowly to and fro.

"May I ask you where you are going to-night?" inquired Ernestine, after some time, in a tone of such indifference that it seemed as if the answer to her question were utterly immaterial to her.

"I am going to call on Fannie," replied Dora.

"Dornberg's sister?"

"Does that seem strange to you? This a sad day

"YOU WILL BE WELCOME," SAID DORA.—*See Page* 248.

for the poor girl, and she will be very grateful for a few words of sympathy and encouragement."

Ernestine shook her head in grave disapprobation; her eyes followed keenly every movement of Dora's.

"I suppose she is expecting you?" she asked.

"Yes. I promised to go to see her after the trial."

"In order to consult with her as to what further could be done for the condemned criminal?"

Dora had stopped in her walk. She divined the object of these questions, but she preserved her composure.

"I don't know what more could be done," she replied calmly. "Do you?"

"No, Dora; and if I did I should, nevertheless, advise you not to meddle with the matter. I should think you must see that there is nothing left you but to drop the acquaintance of these people. Your relations to them have caused you annoyance enough. By keeping up your intercourse with Dornberg's sister you only confirm the rumors that are afloat about you, and those rumors ought to be silenced at any price."

"I find the price you ask of me somewhat high."

"What have I asked?"

"Nothing directly, but, indirectly, my engagement to Sonnenberg."

Ernestine lowered her eyes before Dora's penetrating glance. She read in that glance a suspicion which impressed her unpleasantly.

"I have not mentioned his name," she said.

"But you thought of him when you spoke of the way of putting an end to those rumors."

"And if I did so, can it surprise you? I still maintain that you would silence all those malicious tongues by an engagement, and, in the present state of things, the only person to whom you can become engaged is Sonnenberg."

"Why is he the only one?" asked Dora with asperity.

"Because you have been constantly seen in his company in public of late, and every one knows on what intimate terms he visits here. Did you really think that people would not draw their conclusions from these facts?"

"You know how little I care about such conclusions?"

"And yet it is absolutely necessary that you should defer to them. It is said even now that you are engaged to him and that, Dornberg being convicted, your engagement will be proclaimed."

"Who told you all that?" asked Dora, sarcastically.

"Who? Why, you seem to have no idea how people are busying themselves about you! I cannot go anywhere without hearing the subject discussed. Of course, I deny all these rumors, but that does not do away with them, and I think society would take it very much amiss if they were not verified."

"And I suppose you would also take it amiss?"

"I?" replied Ernestine, with a gesture which was intended to show her indifference. "I have no voice in the matter and would not think of advising you, because I do not wish to lay myself open to future reproaches. Nevertheless, I cannot deny that I would not hesitate long if Herr Sonnenberg were to do *me* the honor of proposing marriage to me. He is a man of sterling worth and steady habits, and comes from a noble family. He will inherit a large fortune from his uncle, and his honorable character—"

"Well, if that is not advising me to accept him," said Dora, scornfully, "then I don't know what advice means. However, there are some persons who have not quite so good an opinion of him. My brother, for instance, would not approve of my marrying him."

"The councillor?" asked Ernestine, in surprise.

"Yes, indeed," answered Dora, whose intention it was to set Sonnenberg against her connections; "he spoke quite unfavorably of him the other day."

The companion's eye rested searchingly and full of impatient expectation upon Dora's face, which was slightly flushed by her inward agitation.

"Well, you know as well as I," she said, "that your brother plots against any one who is near to your heart."

"I have not yet discovered that he ever plotted against you," replied Dora, ironically. "On the contrary, I think he would rather be inclined to make a *protégée* of you. And I should hardly call it plotting when he calls Sonnenberg an adventurer."

"Did he do that?" asked Ernestine, who had great difficulty in restraining her indignation, but could not prevent her eyes flashing with anger. "I do not, indeed, feel called upon to defend Sonnenberg; but whoever casts such an aspersion upon a man of good reputation, should be able to prove it."

"It is quite possible that my brother can do so," replied Dora, calmly, casting a look at the clock. "How time flies! The carriage will be here in a moment. By the way, do not wait at supper for me; I don't know when I shall return, and I may take a cup of tea at Fannie's."

With elevated eyebrows Ernestine looked fixedly at her mistress.

"You spoke of proofs," she asked. "Did your brother give you any?"

"No, I did not ask for them. They are of no value to me."

At that moment a carriage stopped in front of the house.

Dora went to the next room to put on her hat and cloak.

"It is well that I have learned that," muttered Ernestine. "Herr Heppner shall hear from the 'adventurer!'"

Katherine appeared to announce the carriage. Dora returned to the boudoir.

"I beg of you earnestly," said Ernestine, in a low voice, "do not allow yourself to be persuaded to take any foolish steps. It is to be presumed that Fräulein Dornberg does not even now believe in her brother's guilt, and that she intends to enter a protest against his sentence. But whatever her plans may be, do not take part in them, for you are a very conspicuous personage just now."

"I shall always do, without fear or hesitation, whatever I think is right," replied Dora, coolly, as she put on her gloves; "and if I can answer for it to my own conscience I need not be afraid of public opinion."

"That is true; but on the other hand, that same public opinion is a power which ought not to be undervalued. Fräulein Dornberg will understand this, and cannot be offended if you do not call on her any more."

Dora did not answer; she left the room, accompanied by Katherine, and soon after Ernestine heard the carriage roll away.

She quickly fetched a bandbox from the next room and took it to the kitchen.

"You are to carry this hat to the milliner's immedidiately," she said, in a peremptory tone. "It is to be altered this evening, so that it can be sent back tomorrow, as Frau Winkler needs it. And on your way back you can do the errands that I have written down here for you."

"Must I go at once?"

"Yes, it is getting late."

"Then you might have sent me sooner!"

"No arguing, if you please," said Ernestine, sharply "Your mistress has given the order, and you must obey."

"Well, I 'm going. But you 'll have to wait a long time for your supper."

"No matter. Frau Winkler's orders go before anything else."

Ernestine remained in the kitchen until the servant had left, and but a short time had passed before a ring at the bell announced Sonnenberg's arrival.

He listened in silence while she reported her last conversation with Dora, but the veins on his forehead swelled threateningly when he heard that Councillor Heppner had called him an adventurer.

"If Frau Roland hears of that it will go hard with him," he said sarcastically. "I should take him to task myself if Dora had told this to me."

"No, no, you must not do that," Ernestine interrupted him excitedly; "you would betray our secret. We can comfort ourselves with the certainty that Herr Heppner has no influence over his sister."

"I don't see anything consoling in that," he continued; "the councillor is an inquisite gossip, and such people may become very dangerous. It seems to me as if we were still very far from our end. Ernestine, I don't like Dora's calling on Dornberg's sister at this time. The devil knows what plans they may be hatching."

"None that could threaten us."

"What do you know about it?" he said, with a sneer. "Dornberg's innocence may be brought to light by some accident, and then Dora will be reconciled to him at once."

"But his guilt has been proved by his conviction."

"Only until proofs to the contrary are furnished."

"Can they be furnished?"

"Bah, I could do it if I wished to!"

"You?" she cried in amazement. "Who is the real thief, then?"

"Don't trouble yourself," he said mockingly. "I shall not betray anything, not even to you. The matter is too serious for that, and of too great importance to me. And as it is by no means impossible that the secret may be revealed before long, it is necessary, for our own interests, that we should hasten the end."

"You surprise me beyond measure," replied Ernestine, still looking at him, expectantly. "If, indeed, he were to be discharged from prison with the full recogtion of his innocence, then—but I don't believe that will happen; at any rate, not so soon. Otherwise I agree with you perfectly with regard to our hastening the end, and I am doing all I can toward it. I am sorry to say that some prejudice against you seems to have arisen in Dora's mind, which causes me some uneasiness. I cannot combat it openly without spoiling everything, so I can only advise you to wait a few days and then propose to her."

He twisted the ends of his long beard nervously between his fingers.

"Do you think she will accept me?" he asked.

"I cannot tell. Who can calculate a woman's whims with any certainty? Still, I hope and think that she will ask for time to consider your proposal, and then I shall be at liberty to make use of the rights of friendship and work for your interest."

"And if the result should not meet our expectations?"

"Then we may have to resign the fulfillment of our hopes."

"In that case we will talk about other matters," he

said, in so peculiar a tone that she looked at him in surprise. "By heaven, Ernestine, I do not intend to go away from here with empty hands—"

"Hush!" she interrupted him in alarm, rising hastily. "I heard a noise outside—what if anybody heard us!"

She went toward the door; but before she had reached it, it opened and Katherine's sulky face appeared in it.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you?" she asked in an impudent tone.

"By no means!" replied Sonnenberg, who had retained his composure. "Do you happen to have seen any umbrella which I think I must have forgotten when I was here before?"

Ernestine held her hand to her heart, which was beating violently. She cast a look of hate at the old woman, who answered Sonnenberg's question with a curt "No!"

"You see I was right," she said, controlling herself with difficulty. "You probably had no umbrella with you."

"Then I can only ask your pardon for troubling you," he replied in a courteous, but by no means familiar tone, as he took his hat. "I must have left it somewhere also."

With a bow, which Ernestine returned in the same polite, formal manner, he took his leave.

Ernestine ordered Katherine to see him to the door.

The blood was boiling in her veins, and yet she dared not betray her anger. She was forced to restrain herself, if she did not wish to let the old servant discover her secret league with Sonnenberg.

"Have you done all your errands?" she asked when Katherine returned.

"How could I?" replied the old woman, testily. "You

hadn't given me any money for the things I had to buy, so I had to come back for it."

"Another time you had better think what you are about," said Ernestine, hotly, as she threw some coins upon the table. "It's a waste of time to be stupid."

Katherine pocketed the money and gave the companion an insolent look.

"I'm not quite as stupid as you think, I can tell you!" she replied boldly. "And it is just as well to get a look at smart people's cards sometimes. Well, you needn't look at me as if you would like to poison me. I know very well that you would have done it long ago, if you only dared!"

With a hoarse laugh, which had a ring of triumph in it, she took up the bandbox again and went out.

Ernestine realized that this sullen, old woman would henceforth be a dangerous opponent for her.

CHAPTER XIII.

REVELATIONS.

After a long spell of frost, a thaw had suddenly set in. The inevitable consequences of this abrupt change were by no means agreeable for those who were obliged to be abroad.

Since early morning it had been raining incessantly. It was still raining, and, as the water could not flow off quickly enough, it formed broad rivulets and small ponds in the thoroughfares, which were fed still further by the snow that fell from the roofs.

At the same time the wind howled and whistled through the streets and dashed the torrents of rain against the walls and windows of the houses, so that no one felt inclined to go out who could remain at home by his cosy fireside.

Hence, it was not strange that Ernestine could hardly find words for her surprise when Dora, shortly before dusk, sent for a cab.

Of course, she surmised at once that there must be a very serious and important reason for the proposed ex-

pedition, but she did not venture to ask any questions after her first remonstrance had been met by a significant and sarcastic glance.

Dora could have told her that she intended to call on Franciska Dornberg; but nobody makes visits in such weather; and, moreover, Ernestine's answer would, probably, only have afforded her another occasion to give words to her hatred of Dornberg and his friends.

And why should she have told her? She was under no obligation to account to her companion for every step which she took, and, besides, she now saw in her the ally of the man whom she despised.

She had been informed by Katherine of the clandestine meeting of the two on the evening after Gustav's conviction, and Ernestine had not succeeded in making her believe that the interview was an innocent one, or in explaining it by Sonnenberg's search for his forgotten umbrella.

Whatever Frau Hennig might think or surmise, Dora left the house without satisfying the curiosity of her suspicious companion.

She had directed the coachman to drive to Doctor Kerner's office. When she reached it the gas was just being lit.

The lawyer received her with the facetious remark that he had not expected her in such a deluge, and rolled out an easy-chair, with the request that she should make herself comfortable and recover from her hardships.

"When I received your note this morning I felt that I must come, at any cost," said Dora, after having seated herself. "I hope our friends will be of the same opinion, and not allow themselves to be kept at home by the storm."

"You need not fear," replied the doctor, as he ar-

ranged the papers on his writing-desk. "Herr Martin promised to be here on the stroke of six. He said he would come if it rained paving-stones. It wants ten minutes of the time yet."

"I was not thinking of him when I expressed my doubts. Fräulein Dornberg and the colonel have been notified, I suppose?"

"No, Herr Martin did not wish it. He prefers to consult only with us, and I cannot but accept his reasons."

"Has he informed you of the discoveries which he made in England?" asked Dora.

"Only in part; I had no time to speak with him about them in detail, and for that reason we deferred his report until this evening. All that I can tell you at present is that the discovery is a very important one."

"Which appears to have been made without much trouble."

"It certainly seems so, for Martin has returned sooner than he could have expected even in the simplest case. But a man like him is familiar with all the sources; he knows exactly what steps to take and what means to choose. There he is! Did I not tell you that he would keep his word?"

Herr Peter Martin had entered the room with his usual pleasant smile, having left his hat, overcoat and umbrella in the outer office.

"And why should I not have kept my word?" he replied, after having bidden Dora good evening and seated himself in the chair which the doctor offered him. "Did you mean on account of the weather, my dear madam? One of our profession never allows himself to he deterred by that. First of all, however, a question: Doctor," he continued, turning to the lawyer, "may I be perfectly sure that our conversation

cannot be overheard? Your clerks are still at work in the office. There might be an inquisitive one among them."

"Make your mind easy," replied Kerner. "I can depend upon my men. There is not one of them who would dare listen here and betray my official secrets."

"It would be bad enough to have even one of them learn this secret," continued the old gentleman, taking his snuff-box from his pocket and slowly passing his hand over it. "In my opinion the matter is known to too many persons already; consequently I wish decidedly that all further communications on the subject should be confined to ourselves. I must request you urgently to agree to this, my dear madam, even if you should be fully convinced of Fräulein Dornberg's discretion."

"It is a matter of course that I shall do as you wish," replied Dora. "Whatever you think is necessary to decide upon we shall agree to without demur. And now, if you please, let us hear your experiences. You can imagine, Herr Martin, with what impatience and suspense I am looking forward to them."

Peter Martin nodded, laughing, and slowly helped himself to a pinch of snuff.

"On my arrival in London," he commenced, "I at once put myself into communication with an official of the secret police. Certain papers which I had taken with me smoothed my way with the authorities and secured for me the ablest assistance in every quarter. We soon discovered the place where Mrs. Mary Brighton had lived before she came to Germany. It was a miserable garret-room in a large tenement-house. We found a woman there who had been a friend of hers, and from her I learned many things which facilitated my subsequent investigations.

"Mrs. Brighton had confided to her the story of her

life. She was the daughter of a tradesman in Southampton, but had not a very happy home. It is possible that this circumstance had an unfavorable effect on her character and disposition, and led her, as she grew up, to seek compensation elsewhere. At some social gathering she became acquainted with a young gentleman, who made a deep impression on her from the first, and who, under the circumstances, had no difficulty in winning her heart. He called himself John Brighton, was staying at Southampton merely for pleasure, and was apparently quite wealthy, for he dressed very elegantly and took part in all the entertainments gotten up by the young people of the town.

"It was not long before the two were secretly engaged. Mary's father, however, discovered this fact, and, having probably good reasons for mistrusting his would-be son-in-law, forced his daughter to break the engagement and forbade her having any further intercourse with Brighton.

"Unfortunately, he did this in so harsh and despotic a manner that he only aroused opposition and defiance in his daughter.

"She naturally found opportunities for meeting her lover secretly, and the latter considered it to his interest to encourage her in deceiving her father. He finally gave her the choice between breaking their engagement and eloping with him; and Mary, without hesitation, decided for the latter. They concluded to go to London and be privately married there, and her lover expressed his conviction that Mary's father would not refuse in the future to recognize a fact which could no longer be altered.

"But John Brighton was not satisfied with possessing Mary alone. He had no idea of losing her dowry, and as he could not hope that her father would yield it up

voluntarily, he induced Mary to help herself to a goodly sum from the old man's cash-box, which happened just at the time to contain a considerable amount. The girl was too much in love to resist his persuasions. The elopement was successful, and the marriage took place in London.

"Mary's father, however, would hear nothing either of a recognition of this fact or of forgiving his daughter. On the contrary, he sent Mary his curse, and the tie between the two was broken forever. And Mary soon discovered that her husband was nothing but an adventurer, who had neither means of subsistence nor a serious desire to work. As long as they had any money left, they spent it recklessly. Mary loved her husband, and her belief in his love led her to excuse the deception he had practiced on her. And, indeed, she found no opportunity to think either about that or the future, for the gay life which they led in the great, noisy city left no leisure for serious reflection.

"But this state of things came to an end. John Brighton informed her, one day, that he was obliged to go to Germany, there to assert in person his claims to the inheritance of a distant relative. He expressed the wish that she should remain in London in the meantime, and promised to write often and send her money. She was to want for nothing during his absence. In three months, at the latest, as he said, he expected to return with a large fortune, and Mary was too thoroughly convinced of the sincerity and strength of his affection to entertain the slightest suspicion. John Brighton left England, and from that day she saw and heard nothing more of him."

The old gentleman made a pause in order to take a pinch of snuff.

Dora's eyes were fixed upon him in eager suspense

while the doctor was cleaning the glasses of his spectacles.

"Nothing more?" asked the former.

"Nothing whatever. The letters which she sent to the address left her by him were returned to her. He himself neither wrote nor sent any money, and her eyes were opened to the fact that she had been deceived by a scoundrel. She sold almost everything she possessed, one article after another, to keep her alive. She was forced to leave her handsome lodging and remove to that miserable garret, and she thanked heaven when, after many vain attempts, she found a humble tradesman who was willing to pay her a small price for her fancy-work.

"Thus eight months had passed away when, one morning, Mrs. Brighton met a gentleman who, in her more prosperous days, had been intimate with her husband and herself. She pretended not to see him, but he recognized her and spoke to her. He told her that he had been looking for her and was glad to meet her. And then he reported that he had seen her husband in a German city.

"After this information, Mrs. Brighton realized that her love had changed to hatred, and that hatred demanded full satisfaction. She at once resolved to go to the city in question and call her husband to account. She intended to compel him to return to London with her and there deliver him up to the vengeance of her father. She sold a few valuables which she still possessed, in order to obtain money for her journey, and left London the following day.

"All this we learned from Mrs. Brighton's female friend. It now remained to us to find the man who had given her the news of her husband. Fortunately, the woman knew the gentleman's full name. With the

aid of the directory we soon found his residence, and he was quite ready to answer our questions. He had seen Theodor Sonnenberg here, and recognized in him the John Brighton whom he had known in London.

"But, as he was not aware that Brighton had left his wife with evil intentions and had no great liking for the man, he did not look him up or make particular inquiries about him. It struck him as singular, indeed, that Brighton was living here under a different name, but he concluded that this was no business of his, and, moreover, remained in this city but a short time. Subsequently, indeed, he thought the matter over more seriously, and then resolved to seek out Mrs. Brighton and tell her of her husband's whereabouts. Now he regrets having done so."

"So we have a hold on this man now," said Dora, drawing a deep breath. "There seems to be no doubt that he murdered that poor woman."

"And how do you propose to prove that?" asked Martin.

"Prove it? If the court learns all that you have just told us, that will be proof enough!"

"Do you think so? I can only say in reply, that the information I have obtained would not even justify Sonnenberg's arrest. If he married under a false name in London he is responsible for it only to the English law. And even then it would have to be proved that the name he bore over there was a false one, and that he is not John Brighton in reality."

"I hardly think that matter concerns us," observed Doctor Kerner; "we had better turn our attentions to the crime which has been committed in this country."

"Certainly," replied the old gentleman; "but little as we can doubt that Mrs. Brighton met with foul play, the court requires convincing evidence, and that all the

more, because the physician's opinion is against us. If the latter had given murder as the cause of death, the grounds for suspicion which have been discovered so far might suffice to have Sonnenberg locked up; but under existing circumstances things are different. The betrayed wife arrives here, sees her husband in the company of a young, beautiful lady, hears, possibly, that he is engaged to her, and kills herself in despair Who will question the probability and credibility of that explanation when the physicians have pronounced the case one of suicide?"

"You are right, nothing has been proved as yet," said the lawyer, while Dora looked thoughtfully before her. "First of all, the crime itself must be established, and that, I fear, will not be possible at this late day."

"And if it is not possible, Sonnenberg will go scot-free?" asked Dora, indignantly. "Good heavens! It all appears to me so clear and tangible, that there seems no room for the slightest doubt. No one will believe that Mrs. Brighton would surrender the field to her husband so easily. She must have felt impelled to satisfy the hatred and desire for vengeance which took possession of her when she saw him in my company. The right was on her side; she could step between him and me and, by such a humiliating defeat, force him to leave town at once, and she certainly would have done so, if he had not foreseen it. He was probably awaiting her when she left the theatre that night. Possibly he succeeded in pacifying her so far that she followed him to the spot where the crime was committed. It may be, too, that they had an interview the day before, and that, in consequence, he had made his preparations for the murder. No, gentlemen, we can no longer remain idle—"

"I have no intention of doing so," said Martin, who, in

the meantime, had taken out his note-book and glanced at it. "I am as sure of my case as you are, and you may depend upon it that I shall follow it up with indefatigable perseverance. I hope confidently that I shall find the proofs which are still missing here, and if I discover a single one of them, I shall proceed boldly and energetically. Have you, in the meantime, made any further discoveries as to the antecedents of your companion?"

"I have made inquiries," replied Dora, "but I have learned nothing new. I merely found additional proofs of the secret, and confidential relations between her and Sonnenberg, and every reason to suppose that I may expect a proposal from him to-morrow. Of course, I need not say that the result of that proposal will be a complete rupture between him and myself."

"Gently, gently, my dear madam," said the old gentleman, with a smile. "You can always ask for time to consider the matter, which he cannot and will not refuse you. The friend from London will be here in a few days, in order to testify, if necessary, that Sonnenberg called himself John Brighton in England. By that time I may have made some further discoveries here."

He examined his note-book once more and then went on:

"As regards the robbery of Roland's bank, I hardly think that Sonnenberg committed it. On my journey I read over Doctor Kerner's memoranda on the subject repeatedly and considered the matter well, and I cannot agree with you in your suspicion."

Dora was about to answer, but the doctor signed to her to remain silent, and requested the detective to give his reasons for his doubts.

"Well, they are reasons which, I am sure, you will

admit," replied Martin. "Who is this Theodor Sonnenberg? At best, a homeless adventurer; at the worst, a criminal, who may expect to be arrested at any moment. Add to this that he has betrayed an uneasy conscience; his visit to the Black Eagle is sufficient evidence of that. Now let me ask you: Would that man still be here if he had committed that robbery and was in possession of such a large sum of money? Don't tell me that he had felt obliged to stay here to avoid drawing suspicion upon himself or to give testimony at Dornberg's trial; he could easily have found some pretext by which to justify his departure, and would long since have taken himself and his money to a place of safety. And, moreover, he is not the man to deny himself voluntarily when he has the means of enjoying life to his heart's content."

"That would have been very imprudent," objected Dora. "I cannot see any proof against my theory in the fact that Sonnenberg was shrewd enough to avoid such a risk."

"It would certainly have been extremely imprudent if he had remained here," said the old gentleman. "But in Paris he might have led as fast a life as he liked, and he certainly would not have missed that opportunity."

Dora's delicately penciled eyebrows were slightly contracted.

"I think you undervalue that man's shrewdness," she replied. "Although Dornberg has been convicted by the jury, I am still firmly convinced of his innocence; and in whatever light I view the matter, I can arrive at no other conclusion than that Sonnenberg alone could have done the deed."

"I have already told you that, in my opinion, we have been following a false trail, and have thus wasted time unnecessarily," remarked Doctor Kerner.

"You did say so; but you can show me no other way, and so—"

"I can do so, madam; I merely wished to wait until Herr Martin had returned, for we (you and I) cannot follow this trail. The reasons which our friend here advances against the suspicions we have heretofore entertained are the same which I gave you some days ago. I now assert that the thief is to be sought for in Roland's own house, and that he is no other than the person who first made known the robbery."

"Roland himself?" exclaimed Dora, in astonishment.

"Yes, it has come to light that Roland would have been bankrupt even without the robbery. In order to replace the sums which were swallowed up by his extravagant style of living, he had ventured on bold speculations, nearly all of which failed. No one was aware of this. He had succeeded in keeping his losses secret; but now, when he found himself obliged to stop payment, they could be concealed no longer.

"Thus he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and at the same time saw disgrace inevitably staring him in the face. Just at that time he received the money from Baron Busse. The entertainment at his house obliged him to keep it in his safe until the next day. It was a large sum. The thought of the possibility of its being stolen flashed across his mind. What if he should pretend to have been robbed, should abstract the money himself and quietly await the further course of events? It was necessary that the robbery should be discovered while his guests were still present, in order to secure trustworthy witnesses for the future; then the police could search for the thief. It was not to be supposed that any one would suspect him.

"Under these circumstances he would remain a rich man, and his insolvency be so satisfactorily explained

that no one would think of investigating its causes Instead of meeting disgrace, he could demand sympathy and pity. He would still be regarded as an honorable man, even if the thief should not be discovered."

"I must confess that this suspicion has crossed my mind, too," said Herr Martin, thoughtfully; "but I could not follow up the idea, as I had first to learn how matters stood here. And, moreover, I was not aware that Roland would have failed, even without this robbery, a circumstance which must naturally strengthen any mistrust of him."

Dora merely shook her head doubtfully and remained silent.

"I can furnish still other grounds for my suspicion," continued Kerner. "Shortly before the robbery Roland had bought a small villa in the suburbs and given it to his youngest daughter as a wedding-present. In the deed of gift he expressly stipulated that a certain suite of rooms in that villa should at all times be at his own and his wife's disposal; and he availed himself of this clause at once after the robbery and the stoppage of payment which resulted from it."

"H-m! Did the creditors take no notice of that gift?" inquired Martin.

"They certainly would have done so and had it returned to the estate if the insolvency had arisen from a different cause. However, that may be done yet, and I think it will, as soon as the creditors become aware of the true state of things. I merely mentioned the purchase of that villa to show how unscrupulous Roland is in such matters, for it was nothing less than stealing from his creditors."

"It cannot be denied that there is a great deal of probability in what you say," said Dora; "but it seems

incredible that Roland should have committed that theft himself."

"It appears so to you because he is your brother's father-in-law. But let me go on. On the day of Dornberg's conviction, I overheard, by accident, part of a conversation between your brother Roland and Sonnenberg. I caught only a few words; but, as this suspicion had already arisen in my mind, they struck me as very significant. Roland was speaking of his speedy departure. I learned that he and his wife are going to London."

"You know he has a daughter married there," remonstrated Dora. "And, besides, he and his wife do not agree very well with the son-in-law who lives in the villa; that might explain their journey."

"I know all that, but that explanation does not satisfy me," replied the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. "If Roland had a clear conscience, he would remain here and settle his affairs himself, which, as an honorable man, he owes it to his creditors to do. I can only account for his hasty departure by supposing that he wishes to secure his booty. Who can control his movements abroad? Who is to investigate whether he establishes himself permanently in London or elsewhere? Who is to prove in the future that he possesses a snug fortune in government securities, and is living on his income as a gentleman of leisure?"

"Yes, yes, you are right!" said the old gentleman with a nod. "And it is well worth the while to follow up these suppositions. Do you know when he intends to leave?"

"By his own account, some time next week."

"Then we must hurry matters. Do you consider Julius Menzel, the banker, the son-in-law with whom he cannot agree, a man of honor?"

"Certainly," replied Dora; "thoroughly so. If Doctor Kerner is right in his surmises, suspicion can fall only on Roland and his wife. I am quite sure that they would not communicate their dangerous secret to any one else. Neither the daughter nor the son-in-law would have abetted such rascality. But how would Roland know that Gustav Dornberg would leave town that night? How could he foresee that his cashier, by his sudden departure, would draw suspicion upon himself?"

"It is hardly probable that he thought of that," replied the doctor. "He had opened the window and thrown out the key, and meant to leave it to the police to see what they could do with these indications. Possibly the authorities would not have allowed themseves to be misled by them, if chance had not favored him so remarkably. Dornberg's secret flight, his presence in the house at so late an hour, his rupture with you and the hatred of your friends resulting from it—all this could not but direct the attention of the examining magistrate to Dornberg at once, and the possibility that any one else had committed the deed was no longer thought of by any one."

"Was the stolen money in large bills?" asked Martin.

"There were three hundred five-hundred-thaler bills, and the rest was in one-hundred-thaler notes."

"And are the numbers of these bills known?"

"No; as far as I am aware, they have not been inquired after."

The old gentleman rose.

"That trail should have been discovered and followed earlier," he said, as he buttoned his coat and put on his gloves. "Too much time has been lost."

"Who could think of such a possibility?" replied the lawyer. "No mistrust of Roland could arise until his

disordered circumstances became known, and I am convinced that, even now, no one besides ourselves thinks of suspecting him."

"Because it is generally supposed that the guilty one has been found," said Dora, bitterly. "I must confess that I cannot enter into your suspicion yet, either; nor shall I do so until you give me stronger proofs. I still cling to my idea that Sonnenberg committed the deed; and therefore I beg of you not to give up your exertions in that direction. I feel quite sure that this mystery will be solved as soon as Theodor Sonnenberg is arrested."

Peter Martin did not seem inclined to share this opinion, but neither did he attempt to convince Dora of the correctness of his own views.

"Only be careful, dear madam," he said in a warning tone, "not to let Sonnenberg escape us; whether he is guilty of the robbery or not, he is at any rate a person of great importance to us. Otherwise you may leave the following of the trail entirely to me."

He took leave of her with a bow, nodded to the doctor and, after putting on his hat and overcoat in the outer office, went out into the stormy night.

He had no longer any doubt that Sonnenberg had murdered his wife to prevent the frustration of the hopes which he had set on Frau Winkler's hand. But how could his guilt be proved? The case had been officially pronounced one of suicide. There had evidently been no witnesses to the deed, else they would have given information of it on the following morning, and of course there was no hope of extorting a confession from the criminal. Sonnenberg was too shrewd to be caught in that way.

It was a very difficult task, as the old gentleman was forced to admit to himself; but he looked forward

hopefully to the arrival of the friend who had given occasion for Mrs. Brighton's journey to Germany.

If that gentleman declared that Sonnenberg had gone by the name of John Brighton in England, the police would be justified in summoning him and requesting an explanation of that change of name.

To be sure, the detective could not yet see what was to be gained by this. It was quite possible that the hopes which he built upon such a proceeding would prove vain.

Sonnenberg might admit everything, even that Mrs. Brighton had been his wife.

He might assert that she had killed herself in despair at his having ceased to love her. Who could prove that this had not been the case?

And what then?

He was prevented from pursuing the subject by the increased violence of the storm, which impeded his progress and threatened to carry away his hat and umbrella; indeed, even to lift him off his feet.

But, small and thin though he was, he always bore off the victory in struggles like this, and, with an air of triumph, he finally reached the Black Eagle, under the hospitable roof of which he felt safe and comfortable.

There were many guests in the dining-room. His good friend, the head-waiter, could not attend to him exclusively, and he therefore remained alone with his thoughts for quite a while, seated in his accustomed corner, with a bottle of wine before him.

He was considering the grounds for suspicion against Roland, which Doctor Kerner had enumerated.

They contained much that was probable. Roland could easily have made all his preparations in a few minutes and transferred the money to some safe hiding-place during the afternoon.

Why had he spoken to his guests of the large sum of money which he had in the house? Why had he alluded to the possibility of a robbery and taken that occasion to explain distinctly where the third key to the safe was kept?

All this belonged to the preparations, and saved him the answering of many questions which would have been annoying to him. But of course he could not foresee that chance would come to his aid in such a way and throw suspicion on his cashier.

And if he had done the deed his wife must be aware of it—of that there was no doubt. It was even probable that the whole plan had originated in her head.

And now the two were about to leave town, though duty and honor demanded that the banker should remain and endeavor, for the interest of his creditors, to save from the shipwreck whatever could be saved.

In this case, too, it was difficult to furnish proofs. If Roland was really himself the thief, the money was probably at Menzel's villa at the present time, and the grounds for suspicion were not sufficient to justify an examination of the premises, which, after all, might prove unsuccessful.

While the old gentleman was arranging the plan he intended to follow, at the same time eating his supper with a thoughtful air, the other guests disappeared by degrees—some to brave the storm in search of entertainment, some to withdraw to their rooms.

The head-waiter's voice at last roused Herr Martin from his thoughts.

"I hardly think he 'll come to-night," said the former, as he brushed the crumbs off the tablecloth. "Just hear how the wind blows!"

"He may come just because of that," replied the old gentleman, smiling and casting a significant glance at

the handbill which still hung beside the door. "He might feel sure of not finding any guests here in such weather."

"H-m! If he intended to come back at all, wouldn't he be likely to have been here before this?"

"Well, you know he had to allow for the time which it would take for him to write to London, have inquiries made there and receive an answer."

"That is true; but do you know, sir, I can hardly believe—"

"Well, then, doubt as much as you like; only follow my directions implicitly, so that my plans and efforts may not be frustrated. I hope I may count on that?"

"Of course, sir! Indeed, it is my duty to assist you."

With this the head-waiter went to his desk to make out some bills.

The old gentleman took a pinch of snuff and resumed his reflections.

Thus another quarter of an hour had passed away, when the door was suddenly opened vehemently and Sonnenberg entered the room.

His hat was pulled down over his eyes; his long, black beard was disheveled by the wind; and from the umbrella, which he held in his hand, the rain ran down in a small rivulet.

"What weather!" he exclaimed, struggling for breath, while the head-waiter relieved him of his hat and umbrella and assisted him in taking off his overcoat.

"Too bad to turn even a dog out-of-doors in it."

"Yes, I thought I was the last of the guests," remarked Martin, making room for the new-comer at his table.

Sonnenberg stepped to the mirror and arranged his hair and beard with a pocket-comb; then, seating himself, he ordered half a bottle of St. Julien.

"We have some very good pot-roast to-night," said the head-waiter in a tone of modest inquiry.

"Very well; order some for me, if you please."

The two guests exchanged a few general remarks until the head-waiter returned with the wine, opened the bottle and filled Sonnenberg's glass.

"Excellent wine, I must say," said the latter, after tasting it.

Then turning to the head-waiter, he continued: "By the way, you can have that handbill taken down now; I am able to give you the information you desired. I received it from a friend in London this morning."

"And may I ask what it is," replied the head-waiter.

"Well, I am told that Mrs. Brighton was a fugitive from justice; she had no means of subsistence, nor could she count on the aid of her relatives and friends. She had left her father's house secretly some time before, after robbing his cash-box, in consequence of which she was cast off by her family forever. She then united her fortunes with an adventurer, who subsequently deserted her. Poverty overtook her, and she fell lower and lower until she committed some breach of the law, and, to escape arrest, was forced to leave the country. She probably came to this city in the hope of finding some means of earning her living, and was disappointed. It may be, too, that she believed herself in danger of being pursued here as well. In short, the past life of the woman affords sufficient explanation for her suicide, and she was not worth the interest which her fate has excited here."

"And that adventurer who betrayed her," asked the old gentleman, with apparent indifference; "did you hear nothing about him?"

"No; are you interested in the man?"

"Oh, by no means! I was merely wondering if the lady might not have come here to look for him."

Sonnenberg put his eye-glass on his nose and looked at Martin thoughtfully for a while.

"That is hardly probable," he said. "After finding herself betrayed and deserted by that man, she had no longer any reason to expect anything from him."

"Well, she might have intended to call him to account."

"A woman like that?" replied Sonnenberg, contemptuously. "A criminal, who was being pursued by the police?"

"She did not make the impression of a criminal upon me," observed the head-waiter. "She rather seemed to me burdened by sorrow and care."

"I doubt whether you observed her so very closely. Does not the fact that she ventured out only in the evening confirm my assertion?"

"Indeed, that was suspicious," said the old gentleman.

"Decidedly so," continued Sonnenberg. "There is no doubt of the truth of what my friend wrote me about her, and the rest can be easily guessed. And now you know what you wished to know, and you can take down that handbill. No one will come to claim the property left by this lady, you may depend upon it."

"It would not be worth while, either."

"And her relations in England must be aware of that."

"But those relations ought to pay the costs of her funeral," said Martin. "That was the aim of the handbill, you know."

Theodor Sonnenberg shook his head. There was a threatening expression in the look which he gave the detective.

"The relations will deny any obligations on their part, and that is only natural, for Mrs. Brighton had cast loose from them. But, if you wish to follow up this matter still further, I must ask you not to count on my assistance any longer. My friend in London would hardly care to take any more trouble about it."

"All he need do is to give us the addresses of the relatives," said the head-waiter; "the authorities will see to the rest."

"I must beg to decline making even that proposition to him. It would be useless trouble. May I ask you for my bill?"

"Are you going to leave us already?" asked Martin in surprise.

"I am expected at the house of a friend, and merely stopped here to take a light supper. The storm seems to have abated," he continued, listening, while he pushed back his plate and took out a toothpick; "all the better. I suppose you are very glad to have your curiosity about that Englishwoman satisfied?"

"H-m! I cannot say that it is quite satisfied," replied the head-waiter, to whom this question was addressed. "There is much which is still dark."

"And which will probably never be cleared up, my dear sir. It is really not worth while to trouble yourself about the matter. What good will it do you if you— Pah! I am done with the whole affair."

He threw the amount of the bill on the table, and rose. It almost seemed as if he dreaded being asked any more questions, for he took his departure in singular haste.

"And what do you say now?" asked the head-waiter.

"That he will not return," replied Peter Martin, thoughtfully.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Our questions evidently troubled him, and I am convinced that if we had asked his name he would not have given it."

"That may be; but he had every reason to expect these questions, and if they were unpleasant to him, he ought not to have meddled in the affair. What is your opinion of the information which he pretended to have received from London?"

"That it is a very clumsy invention," said the old gentleman, who had also begun to make his preparations for leaving. "It is partly true and partly false, and might have been arranged much more skillfully."

"Then you have made inquiries over there, too?"

Martin pretended not to have heard this question. He slowly buttoned his overcoat and put a woolen muffler around his neck.

"You had better let that handbill remain there a few days longer," he said. "We cannot tell what it may be good for, and, at any rate, it will do no harm. As I said before, he will not return. He thinks that your mind is at rest on the subject now, and depends on your taking down the handbill in consequence."

"As far as I am concerned, it may stay there till it falls off of itself," said the head-waiter, handing the old gentleman his umbrella. "To be sure, the coarse jokes that are constantly being cracked about it are not agreeable, but—"

"Patience, my good friend! I am sure that before very long you will be able to revenge yourself for those coarse jokes, and then you will have all the laugh on your side. Good night!"

"Good night, Herr Martin."

The head-waiter locked the house-door after the old gentleman and shook his closely shorn bullet-head with a supercilious air.

"All nonsense," he muttered. "But those gentlemen of the police are always suspecting some dark crime; it's their business, and they get in the habit of it."

He took the arrac-bottle from the cupboard, mixed himself a glass of grog, listened for a few moments to the howling of the storm, which had broken out again with renewed force, and then became engrossed in his account-books, without thinking any farther of Mrs. Brighton and her supposed murderer.

CHAPTER XIV.

REJECTED.

Dora had not been mistaken in her supposition that Sonnenberg would soon put the decisive question to her.

She read the resolve in his face when, shortly before noon on the following day, he entered her drawing-room. She saw the quick, significant glance which he cast at her companion, and her indignation against this fortune-hunter awoke anew within her in full force.

Since she had been told what the detective had learned with regard to him in London, she actually felt an aversion to him. She would have given much to have been able at that moment to confront him with the terrible accusation that he was a thief and a murderer.

In his usual courteous manner, he raised her hand to his lips and seated himself opposite to her.

"Allow me to express the hope that your mind is more at ease now," he said, glancing keenly at her lovely face. "I am sure you must have resigned yourself to the unalterable facts and formed the wise resolve to forget the man who proved so unworthy of your love."

"You might be wrong in your supposition," replied Dora, with forced composure.

"I can hardly believe that, for no other reason than because you cannot fail to remember what you owe to your reputation and your position in society. You must permit me to revert once more to the subject which Frau Hennig brought up a few days ago. I am obliged to do so, for your own sake. The scandal-mongers are growing bolder and bolder; and when I reprove them, I am asked, mockingly, what gives me the right to enter the lists in your favor."

"That sounds very alarming indeed," replied Dora, in a tone of mingled irritation and sarcasm. "What have I done that is so bad?"

"Nothing but that you have not openly dissolved your relations with that man," was Sonnenberg's answer. While his eyes, which were glowing with passion, again turned significantly to the companion, who left the room noiselessly.

"Ought not every one to take it as a matter of course that my engagement to him no longer exists?"

"Certainly; but, nevertheless, they cling to the belief that it has not been canceled."

"I am sure I don't see how I can convince them of the contrary."

"Nothing easier than that," he cried, in violent agitation, seizing her hand, which she hastily withdrew from his grasp. "Dora, you must have known how much I love you, you must have discovered it long ago. Make me the happiest of men by giving me the rights of a betrothed husband. Then no one will venture to blame you or to connect your name any longer with that of a criminal."

She lowered her eyelids for a moment. She did not wish him to read in her eyes the anger which blazed up within her.

He interpreted the flush on her cheeks in his favor,

and did not see the bitter, defiant expression which lurked in the corners of her mouth.

"I need not tell you that I will do all in my power to make you happy," he continued. "I know that you do not care about such effusions, nor can I find words to describe as I would wish the feelings which I entertain for you. I can only entreat you to intrust your life and your future to me, and assure you that you will never regret it. You are acquainted with my circumstances, my future prospects and the traits of my character. There is nothing in any of these which could cause you any anxiety or mistrust of me—"

"Nothing?" Dora interrupted him, unable to conceal her indignation at this audacious self-praise. "I am not so sure of that."

"And what reason have you for doubting it?" he asked, somewhat taken aback.

"I have various reasons."

"Which you must inform me of, so that I can refute them."

"I must?" replied Dora, haughtily. "What should force me to do so?"

"The consideration for public opinion to which I directed your attention a while ago."

"You have nothing to do with that."

"More than you think," he replied, irritated by the sharp tone which she had assumed, and which led him to fear, even now, that his hopes might not be realized. "Your name is also connected with my own, not through any fault of mine. It is but the natural result—"

"I wish to hear nothing more of what people say or think about me," she interrupted him in so peremptory a tone that he remained silent. "If you thought that I would allow myself to be influenced by that you were mistaken."

He bit his lips in suppressed anger and nervously twirled the points of his beard.

"I did not allude to that circumstance," he said with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "because I considered it necessary in order to induce you to favor my wishes. I merely wished to draw your attention to the fact."

"No more of this, if you please!"

"And you will not tell me why you distrust me?" he asked, once more forcing himself to the friendly tone in which he had addressed her before. I thought, until now, that nothing stood between us but the memory of that scoundrel who deceived you—"

"Have you never deceived a woman?" she again interrupted him.

"Not to my knowledge."

"And yet I suspect, in spite of that declaration, that Mrs. Mary Brighton knew you very well."

This blow fell upon him so unexpectedly that he started, and even though he did not lose countenance, she did not fail to notice his sudden alarm.

"I have told you repeatedly that that lady was an utter stranger to me. Why then do you revert to the subject at the present time?"

"Because, just at this moment, I happened to remember the lady's looks so full of hatred and revenge," she replied gravely, fixing her eyes upon him. "I have never doubted for a moment that those looks were meant for you alone."

"I regret that the poor woman is no longer alive so that I might make it possible to set your mind at rest on that subject."

"I do not think that—"

"I should prove to you that the lady never knew me."

Dora was incensed at this lie; she felt tempted to

cast the name of John Brighton in his face. No one, it seemed to her, could expect her any longer to pretend to be on friendly terms with this man.

She forgot the warning and plans of the detective. Dislike, abhorrence and contempt had taken possession of her thoughts and feelings so entirely that she no longer was conscious of anything but the irresistible impulse to break with this man forever.

"If that is the only reason which induces you to doubt the sincerity of my affection, you will be obliged to admit that it cannot be called a valid one," he resumed, after a pause. "I was happy in being allowed to call myself your friend; I believed that that friendship justified me in entertaining hopes the fulfillment of which promised me the highest earthly happiness, and now I learn that you trouble your mind with groundless suspicions which shake the confidence with which you have favored me hitherto. I entreat you to do away with this mistrust; to give me your full confidence again, and you may rest assured that, as my wife, you shall be as happy as you deserve to be."

"I regret—"

"Do not deprive me of all hope," he exclaimed, in feverish agitation. "Ask for time to consider? I will gladly give it to you. Consult with your friends—"

"No, Herr Sonnenberg, I shall not do so, for I cannot expect any sincere advice from that quarter," she replied, icily. "You know perfectly well that my heart, with all its thoughts and feelings, still belongs to that unhappy man whom you call a scoundrel, and that it will be his forever. Yon might, therefore, have told yourself that the realization of your hopes is impossible."

"No, no," he replied quickly. "I could not tell myself that, for I could not consider the continuation

of your love to a condemned criminal as anything but folly."

"Perhaps no one knows as well as you that he was innocently condemned," she cried, fixing her flashing eyes on Sonnenberg, with a penetrating look.

"Madam," he replied, rising from his seat, "I do not understand the meaning of those words, but I suspect that it is insulting to me. Nor do I know what reason you have for feeling such anger against me, for I am not conscious of having given you any occasion for it. If I have been slandered to you, I suppose I may beg of you to tell me plainly what you have heard, and thus make it possible for me to defend myself."

"No, indeed," said Dora, who had recovered her composure and now perceived that she had gone too far; "no one has slandered you to me."

"Then what you said was merely a surmise?" he asked, in a subdued tone.

"You must be satisfied with what I told you before: I cannot forget the man whom I still love."

"Notwithstanding that you know certainly that he deceived you?"

"So I was told at the time, and I can never forgive myself for believing it. Now I am better informed."

His face had grown livid. The deep furrows between his angrily contracted eyebrows told of evil, revengeful thoughts.

"Then you will give me no hope whatever?" he said, as he took up his hat.

"Of what use would a hope be to you, the realization of which is impossible?" she replied. "I regret that you have forced me to tell you all this, but you demanded frankness of me, and I felt myself obliged to comply with your request."

A spiteful expression crossed Sonnenberg's face. He bowed ceremoniously.

"You might have done so more courteously, madam," he said hoarsely. "I am not conscious of having done anything which would give you the right to insult me."

"That was not my intention!" she interrupted him, quickly.

"And still you said that no one knew better than I that Dornberg was innocently condemned."

"In moments of excitement we do not always remember that our words may be misunderstood," replied Dora. "Pray consider that remark unsaid, or of no significance. And do not bear me any ill-will for the answer which I have given you, which I was obliged to give, because my heart dictated it to me. Under other circumstances it might have been different."

He bowed again, and retired slowly to the door.

"Farewell!" he said. "May you never regret having repulsed the hand of a true friend."

Dora turned away from him with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

He left the room, and when he had closed the door behind him, his livid features were distorted by the evil passions raging within him.

Another door opened softly and Ernestine glided into the passage.

She started when she saw his face, and hastily laid her finger on her lips, so as to warn him against a loud outbreak of his fury.

"I heard everything," she whispered. "I cannot understand her answer—only yesterday she seemed inclined to accept you."

The quivering of his lips showed how difficult it was for him to control his excitement.

"That hope is destroyed forever! I must speak to you to-night, Ernestine."

"To-night? I don't know if—"

"You must make it possible!"

"I might go to you—"

"No, I do not wish that!" he said quickly. "I have reason to suppose that our friendly relations are suspected. Where was Dora last evening?"

"At Fräulein Dornberg's, I think."

"Well, I will send her a letter; the contents of which will, I hope, induce her to go out this evening again. Then you must send the servant away. Can you do so without exciting suspicion?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Ernestine, somewhat alarmed.

"I will tell you to-night. When the coast is clear here put the lamp near the window. I shall be watching for the signal, and will come as soon as it is given."

Again a door was opened. Dora stood before them.

Sonnenberg hastened to take a ceremonious leave and to disappear through the outer door of the apartment.

With an apparently unembarrassed air Ernestine followed her mistress into the drawing-room. She had no suspicion of the storm that was raging in Dora's bosom.

"I suppose I owe it to you and to your underhand dealings that that man dared offer me his hand?" Dora began, in a cutting tone, while she paced slowly to and fro. "The accusation which Gustav Dornberg made against you appears to me in a very different light now, and I can only regret bitterly that my eyes were not opened sooner."

Ernestine had seated herself in an easy-chair. A scornful smile hovered around her thin lips.

"I do not understand you," she said coldly. "That Sonnenberg would make you an offer you could foresee as well as I; and, if you would be just, you cannot deny that you have encouraged his attentions. How could he suppose that you would consider him presumptuous? You have appeared in public only in his company—"

"And in secret he tried to influence me through you," Dora interrupted her, impatiently. "Even though I remained silent I was well aware of your clandestine meetings and interviews."

"Well, then, if Herr Sonnenberg asked me to say a word in his favor, why should I have been so uncivil as to refuse?" asked Ernestine, now likewise assuming an aggressive tone. "All that I did was solely for your interest. You had to cut loose at last from that criminal—"

"In order to give my hand to a fortune-hunter? Do not look so surprised. You know that man and his past life. You entered into a league with him of which I was to know nothing. And you did so while I was still engaged to Gustav and before any shadow had fallen upon our happiness, and you two made common cause with my brother and his family. All this I now recognize clearly and distinctly, and I repeat that I can only regret that these intrigues did not come to my knowledge sooner."

Ernestine had risen. However hate might have taken possession of her, she yet succeeded in retaining her outward composure.

"Your reproaches are highly offensive and insulting," she replied, tossing her head defiantly. "I cannot comprehend how Sonnenberg's offer can have excited you so violently, and I can understand still less the injustice with which you heap reproaches upon me.

Nor do I know of what you can accuse me, for I cannot see that I have done wrong, even if I did countenance the suit of so thoroughly honorable a gentleman."

"Honorable!" said Dora, sarcastically, again forgetting, in the desire to give vent to her indignation, the warning of the detective. "I do not consider him so."

"Have you proofs to the contrary?" asked Ernestine, watching her keenly.

"Not yet; but—"

"Ah, so you are ready to condemn him on the strength of mere suppositions. Then, of course, there is no use in defending him."

"Did the jury, who convicted Gustav Dornberg, have any better proofs?" asked Dora. "But enough of this—you will understand that we cannot remain together any longer then after these explanations. I leave it to you to sever our connections in the manner most convenient to you. You are welcome to remain under my roof until you find another position that suits you. I will not hurry you, and am ready to agree to any reasonable wish you may entertain."

A low knock at the door interrupted the conversation, and the next moment Frau Heppner entered the room.

Did she know already that Sonnenberg had been rejected?

Dora could hardly believe it to be the case; but, nevertheless, she received her sister-in-law more coolly than was her wont.

"I only came to invite you for this evening," said the latter, looking after Frau Hennig, who left the room somewhat noisily. "Papa and mamma are going to leave us next week to go to London, and as we probably shall not see them again very soon, we want to have a family-gathering at our house to-night."

"I must beg to decline," said Dora, rather distantly. "You know I am not on very good terms with your family."

"Goodness, how excited you are! Have you had a quarrel with your companion?"

"If I have she may thank her friends for it."

Frau Heppner's steel-gray eyes flashed angrily.

"You said that in a very singular tone," she replied. "Do you count me among those friends of hers?"

"All of you. You were all in league with Sonnenberg against me."

"With Sonnenberg? Against you?" asked her sister-in-law in surprise, shaking her head. "You must allow me to remark that your meaning is incomprehensible to me."

"You may say so, Marie," replied Dora, sarcastically, "but I do not believe in the truth of your assertion. I know only too well that Gustav Dornberg owes his misfortunes solely to your intrigues, and that Sonnenberg took an active part in them. Altogether, I am better informed on that subject than you may think, and for that reason my rejection of Sonnenberg's offer was a very plain and decided one."

"Good gracious! He has proposed to you?" said Frau Heppner, in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say that you were not aware of his intention?" asked Dora, ironically.

"I had no idea of it!"

"Perhaps not of his carrying it out to-day."

"And you refused him?"

"Certainly; notwithstanding that I knew how much you all wished the contrary. You made a mistake in your calculations—"

"But, Dora, there can be no question of any mistake, for we never thought of making any caculations.

Mamma may have desired the match. Sonnenberg has been intimate with my parents for some time, you know; but I am sure she never thought of bringing about the fulfillment of her wish by an intrigue. I must protest decidedly against this reproach, as far as my parents and I are concerned. For your companion, indeed, I cannot answer. If your accusation against her is well founded you can easily punish her for her abuse of your confidence by dismissing her."

"Which I have already done," replied Dora, with a glance of displeasure at the door through which Ernestine had disappeared. "I suspect that those two have known each other long and well, but I do not care to investigate the matter. Their plans are frustrated; that is enough for me."

"We will talk the matter over more explicitly when you have grown calmer," said her sister-in-law, rising. "For the present you must excuse me; I have still a good deal to do for this evening. Sonnenberg is invited too; but if he hears that you are coming, and Heinrich can tell him so—"

"Pray, make no changes on my account. You can easily understand that I am not in the mood to join your party."

"Poor child," rejoined Frau Heppner, in a commiserating tone, extending her hand. "You ought not to—"

"Enough!" interrupted Dora. "I do not let the matter trouble me; I have done with it now. As soon as my other affairs are settled I may go away from here entirely."

"Must I infer from that that you wish to break with us?" asked her sister-in-law, reproachfully. "I really do not see what reason you could have for doing so. And as for Sonnenberg, he certainly will not stay here

much longer after this defeat. So you need not fear any more meetings with him."

"I think I know him better," replied Dora, bitterly. "I should not be in the least surprised if he were to take some low means of revenging himself on me now."

"If he dares do that our doors will be closed to him forever, and he may be prepared to have Heinrich call him to account most energetically. But don't trouble yourself any more; Heinrich will see that Sonnenberg stays away to-night, so be sure and come; it will divert your mind and cheer you up a little. I shall certainly expect you."

Dora gave no answer, nor did Frau Heppner wait for one. She hastened downstairs, told the coachman to drive to Menzel's villa, and entered the carriage.

The smiles now disappeared from her lips and her brows were angrily contracted. She was highly indignant at Dora's harsh rejection of Sonnenberg.

She had hoped to find the engagement accomplished. She knew that Sonnenberg intended to ask the decisive question at this time and had hastened to Dora's house prepared to assist her with her advice, and do away with any possible doubts.

And now she had been received in this offensive manner, and overwhelmed with reproaches!

Was all really over, and was there no longer any hope for Sonnenberg?

She could not believe it. Her mother would surely discover some way out of the difficulty, and, moreover, she had no doubt that she would find Sonnenberg at the villa.

It had been agreed upon that he should come there immediately after his proposal in order to report the result; and, however incensed he might be, this was

just the time when he stood most in need of the advise of his allies.

Her expectations were realized. Sonnenberg was already closeted with her parents; he had just finished his report when she arrived.

"I 'm afraid there 's nothing more to be done," said Roland, in a tone of regret, shaking his bald head and casting a furtive glance at his wife, who sat on the sofa in an attitude of defiance. "That harsh, almost insulting refusal leaves no room for doubt that Dora's resolve is final."

"I will not give up hope so quickly," said his wife, severely. "Her companion will—"

"Ernestine Hennig has been discharged," her daughter interrupted her. "Dora accused her of being secretly in league with Herr Sonnenberg. She blames us, too, and told me, in plain words, that she knew more about our plans than we thought she did."

Sonnenberg, at the first moment, had stared at Frau Heppner in undisguised dismay. He had not been prepared for Ernestine's discharge.

"Did I understand you to say that Frau Hennig has left the the house?" he asked hoarsely.

"I don't know, but I hardly think so. So sudden and so serious a breach would create a sensation, which I am sure both ladies would rather avoid. But, of course, we must all see that nothing more can be expected of the companion under these circumstances."

"Then Heinrich must see what he can do," said Frau Roland, in the kind of tone which admits of no contradiction. "He must force Dora, for the sake of her own reputation, to contract an engagement which is already town-talk. He must—"

"Do not trouble yourself, madam," Sonnenberg interrupted her, with cutting sarcasm. "I told her all

that myself, and so plainly that she could not misunderstand it. And, moreover, the councillor would be the last person who could bend that stubborn will."

"Yes, indeed; my husband has no influence whatever over his sister," remarked Frau Heppner. "And Dora accuses us of being the cause of Dornberg's ruin."

"Is she still attached to that fellow?" asked Roland, scornfully. "How can she be so foolish?"

"She declared to me that she still believes him innocent," replied Sonnenberg, giving the banker a look which seemed to force him to lower his eyes. "I am convinced that she would gladly give half her fortune if she could prove him to be so."

"And if she succeeded, she would marry him," said Frau Roland, drumming on the table with her thin, pointed fingers. "That would furnish more food for interesting gossip."

"But such a thing is not to be thought of," replied her daughter, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. "It is beyond all possibility to prove Dornberg's innocence. Is there no way of forcing Dora to retreat from her decision?"

"Will she come to your house to-night?" asked Roland.

"No, for she declined my invitation point-blank."

"I, too, must retract my acceptance," said Sonnenberg to Frau Heppner. "I trust you will bear me no ill-will on that account. If Dora hears of it she will probably come—"

"No, not even then; she refuses decidedly."

"We ought to spread the report of her engagement to Herr Sonnenberg," said Frau Roland, with an ugly, spiteful expression about the corners of her mouth. "That would be the only means of bringing a pressure to bear upon her."

"You cannot accomplish anything in that way," Roland objected. "If the gossip annoys her she will go away from here. We know how quick she is in her decisions."

"Let me beg of you once more to take no further trouble in the matter," said Sonnenberg, and though his eyes flashed angrily, his voice sounded cold and calm. "I should forfeit my self-respect if I were to cling to any hopes after this defeat, and strive to mend matters by unfair means."

He had risen at the last words. He seemed to have done with the matter entirely.

"Herr Sonnenberg, may I offer you a seat in my carriage?" asked Frau Heppner.

"You are very kind," he answered, bowing slightly. "If it would not trouble you to wait a few minutes, I shall be happy to accept your invitation."

"Certainly, with pleasure," she replied, with a nod.

"Herr Roland, may I speak to you for a moment in private?"

The banker started involuntarily, when he saw those burning eyes fixed so keenly upon himself. He rose slowly, and the two went into the adjoining room.

"I have no time at present to enter into the details of the business matter upon which I wish to confer with you," Sonnenberg began, refusing the chair which was offered him. "May I request you to call at my rooms soon after dinner?"

Roland, while looking at him with increasing surprise, turned pale, and his face wore an expression of serious anxiety.

"What business can you have to transact with me?" he asked evasively. "You know I have withdrawn from business altogether."

"It is a matter about which I can speak to you only in private," replied Sonnenberg, gravely.

"H-m, I don't know—"

"Whether you will have time? I think you will, Herr Roland, and I expect you with certainty."

The words sounded like a command, but the banker still hesitated; that abrupt, imperious tone only served to increase his unbounded dismay.

"If I only knew—" he said doubtfully.

"Do you remember the night of your daughter's wedding?" Sonnenberg now asked in a subdued voice. "Do you recollect that I was seized with the nosebleed at a certain hour, and went into the garden? Perhaps you can recall the rest?"

Roland had started back as if a ghost had suddenly risen out of the ground before him; his face was livid, his staring eyes protruded from their sockets.

"I do not understand you at all," he said, and, desperately though he tried to control himself, he could not prevent his voice from trembling. "I don't know what you mean by your allusions to that evening."

"Do you really not know?" asked Sonnenberg, sarcastically.

"No, no; but—"

"But you will come, will you not?"

"Well, I suppose I must, in order to have this riddle solved. I have to go to town, at any rate. Menzel, my son-in-law, has made up his mind to a piece of folly which I wish to talk him out of. I will be witn you soon after dinner."

Sonnenberg arose and returned to the drawing-room.

"I am ready, madam," he said; and not even the keenest observer could have read in the calm, almost cheerful expression of his face the inward excitement wihch had possession of him.

Frau Heppner rose and took leave of her parents. Frau Roland's eyes rested searchingly on her husband. It almost seemed as if she had guessed the object of the private interview, for her features, too, expressed secret anxiety.

"Do not give up all hope," she said, as he raised her hand to his lips. "What I once make up my mind to I always carry through, and I am confident that I shall be able to congratulate you on your engagement before long."

"I regret that I cannot share that confidence," he replied, coldly. "Consequently, I must request you, once more, to take no further trouble in the matter. Till this afternoon, then, Herr Roland."

He left the room in Frau Heppner's company, and soon after the carriage bore them away.

"What did Sonnenberg want of you?" Frau Roland asked her husband, who, in feverish excitement, was measuring the room with long strides.

The banker stopped and stamped his foot angrily.

"I wish we had never seen that swindler," he said, gnashing his teeth.

"Why, if I may ask?"

"Because he played the spy that evening. I presume he knows everything."

"Everything?" she asked, while her thin hands grasped his arm so firmly that he could have screamed with pain. "Did he say so?"

"He hinted at it; he expects me at his room, after dinner."

"Did he threaten you?"

"He commanded me to come, and there was threat enough in that command. I could not misunderstand it."

She released his arm, but her gray eyes remained fixed upon him with a piercing look.

"I expect you will not allow yourself to be intimidated, if your surmise should be correct," she said, and her voice, too, now sounded imperious. "What can he prove? Nothing! His testimony is of no greater value than yours, and I do not believe that, for his own sake, he will venture to accuse you. Concede nothing, and laugh at him if he threatens you."

"And you think I can rid myself of him in that way?" he asked ironically. "I know him better than that. He 'll hold the knife to my throat, and—"

"Let him cut it then, if you have no courage left!" she interrupted him, scornfully. "They will not find anything here, and I, for my part, do not intend to be cheated out of the harvest."

"If we can avert the danger by a slight sacrifice that would be preferable!" he remarked, somewhat crestfallen.

"And what do you call a slight sacrifice? You would be putting a weapon in his hand with which he could pursue us to the end of our lives. No, never consent to that, Oscar. If you hold out your little finger to him you thereby give him a right to take your whole hand."

"Then you think I had better not go?"

"Did you promise?"

"I could not help it."

"Then you will have to go. At any rate, it is well that we should learn what to expect. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll go on to London at once and take the black trunk. You can follow me in a few days. And even if my luggage should be examined, no one will find out that that trunk has a double bottom."

"I don't think so either, but—"

"Ah, bah, don't be a coward! Fortune has favored

us so far, and I think will continue to do so if we only face boldly everything that may present itself. If he is very hard on you, ask for a few days to think the matter over so that I may gain time. I cannot leave before day after to-morrow. I must make my farewell calls and pack my clothes; and, besides, my departure must not look like flight. And now we 'll go downstairs; Léonie will be waiting dinner for us."

"I had rather take my dinner up here," her husband said, hesitating.

"Don't be a child," replied she, testily. "Menzel will not be at home to-day; he is dining in town with a business friend, and Léonie is not observing enough to notice your uneasiness."

"I have a bone to pick with Menzel this afternoon."

"On account of this villa? Pshaw, what do we care if he wants to hand it over to your creditors! The loss all falls upon him."

"And Léonie?" he asked. "It is she who owns the house. She ought to hold fast what is hers."

"You know her weak character," replied his wife, shrugging her shoulders. "We have annoyances enough of our own; it would be foolish if we were to trouble ourselves about this matter, too."

"I 'd give anything if we were in London now," said Roland with a sigh, passing his hand over his eyes. "We will not be free from care until we are there."

"We will get there," she replied confidently. "Only remain firm. No proofs can be found; and if Sonnenberg should, nevertheless, think himself justified in threatening us, I 'll make matters plain to him and teach him better."

Roland, indeed, still shook his head dubiously, but his wife's confidence appeared to have encouraged him; followed her downstairs to take dinner with Léonie.

CHAPTER XV.

THUMBSCREWS AND PITFALLS.

Theodor Sonnenberg dined, as usual, at his hotel, and was as talkative and cheerful as ever. No one among his companions could have guessed that he had, a short time before, been scornfully rejected by the fair lady about whom they had often rallied him. They were surprised, however, that, while he generally remained for awhile after dinner to smoke his cigar while chatting with them, or joining in a game of cards, on this occasion he left hastily, immediately after the dessert.

Having reached his house, he had hardly divested himself of his hat and overcoat, when Roland made his appearance.

Sonnenberg received him in the most friendly manner, shook hands with him, drew an armchair to the table, and offered him a cigar.

And this cordiality encouraged Roland in his resolve to oppose, energetically, any demand which might be made on him.

Before he left the villa, he had had another very serious conversation with his wife, and had impressed her instructions and warnings upon his memory; now he determined to follow those instructions.

The cigars were lit. Sonnenberg leaned back in his chair, and, for quite awhile, watched the smoke as it curled about him.

"If my hopes had been realized and Dora Winkler had become my wife, I would not have meddled in your affairs," he said at last, slowly passing his hand over his black beard and fixing his eyes keenly on the banker's thin face. "You might have left this place and enjoyed yourself in London or Paris, undisturbed, and Dornberg's fate would not have troubled me, either. Now, however, matters have, unfortunately, taken another turn. We were wrong in our suppositions, my dear sir. Your esteemed lady is, undoubtedly, a very shrewd woman, but on this occasion she has proved herself mistaken, and I have to bear the consequences."

"Things may come right yet," replied Roland. "A woman's whims are beyond calculation, and Dora has more whims than—"

"Excuse me, the question in this case is not one of whims, but of a well-considered resolve, to which I am forced to submit," continued Sonnenberg. "It would be childish folly for me to enter into your wife's plans; all the more, because other members of your family are counteracting those plans."

"I cannot believe that."

"It is true, nevertheless. Councillor Heppner has designated me to his sister as an adventurer."

"He may have done so intentionally, because he knows that Dora generally acts contrary to his advice."

"In that case he would probably have used some other expression. By calling me an adventurer he could only serve me an ill turn. But, as I said before, those plans and hopes are at an end now, and even though your wife may form some new project, I shall not enter into it. You will find it natural, too, that I cannot

remain here any longer, for there is no doubt that my disappointment will soon become known, and in that case I should be exposed to many disagreeable remarks. I have decided to leave to-morrow or, at the latest, the day after; but before I go, I am going to ask you to furnish me with the necessary funds."

"Ask me? A man who has nothing himself?" cried Roland, with an attempt at jesting. "You know very well that I have given everything I possess to my creditors. I am dependent on the bounty of my children now."

"That, indeed, is what every one thinks; but I know better," replied Sonnenberg, shrugging his shoulders. "I must remind you once more of the evening on which your safe is supposed to have been robbed. I have told you already that I was in the garden. I had gone there to cool off. Suddenly a light appeared in the window of your cash-room. I saw that the window was opened softly, and an object which I could not distinguish was thrown out and flew past me. I could see you distinctly. The nervous rapidity of all your movements, in everything which you did, could not escape my notice; and, as it were, forced me to watch your actions.

"You went to the safe; it was open. You looked in; leaned the door ajar, then went into your office, and the next moment I heard the shrill sound of a bell. Your intentions were not clear to me at first; but as soon as you had reported the robbery, I knew who had committed it. I was much interested in observing you while the commissioner of police was addressing his questions to you. A single word from me would have put a stop to those questions, and no one would have thought of pursuing Dornberg. It may be that everything would have turned out differently and better if I

had spoken! Dora would have given me credit for great honesty of purpose, and that, together with the breach between your family and myself which must have followed, might have won me her favor and her confidence at once. Dornberg was gone, no reconciliation was possible between them; Dora would have ceased thinking of him.

"Unfortunately I knew nothing of his departure until the next morning, and then it seemed to me best to suffer suspicion to rest on him, for I could not foresee that Dora would not allow herself to be convinced of his guilt; so I let matters take their course. I permitted Dornberg's conviction because I built my hopes upon it; and, as I said before, I should not have raised any obstacles to your departure if those hopes had been realized. That, however, is not the case, as you know, and I now ask you, in the most friendly spirit, what value my silence has for you?"

"None whatever," replied Roland, knocking the ashes from his cigar and casting a sly, crafty look at his companion. "You seem to possess great talent for story-telling in the detective line, my dear sir; if you develop that talent you may, in time, become very successful. But so far you have hardly enough of it for blackmail, for, in the story which you have just been telling me, the proofs are wanting in the first place."

"I think they could be found at your residence," replied Sonnenberg, in the same ironical tone.

"As I am likely to be better informed on the subject than you, I can give you the assurance that a search for them there would be vain."

"I have no doubt of that. I remarked a while ago that your wife was a very shrewd woman."

"Ah! So she plays a part in your story, too?"

"Of course," replied Sonnenberg; "the part of stage-manager. She stands behind you and prompts every word you are to say."

Roland looked around laughing; but his laugh was hoarse and forced.

"Capital!" he said. "You have thought the matter over thoroughly. I can see that from the readiness with which you meet every objection. However, exert your brain as you will, the whole story is nothing but a fable, which no one will believe. You watched me that night when I discovered the robbery. I found the writing-desk in my office broken open, and saw the paper lying upon it in which the key had been wrapped. Would not that at once lead me to conclude that some one had made use of that key to rob my safe? What was more natural than that I should go to the cash-room in great excitement, light the gas there, and go to the open window and to the safe, which was likewise open? Did you see me take out the bills?"

"Ah, bah! You had probably done that before."

"Another unsubstantial snpposition, my dear sir. You further assert that I threw some object out into the garden, and that is the chief trump which you play, and of the invention of which you are, doubtless, very proud. That object could, of course, only be the key which was subsequently found in the garden. But how will you prove that I actually threw it out? Do you really think that your assertions will be believed on their own strength? I could just as well say that you had pretended to have the nosebleed that evening, in order to commit the robbery. Let me turn the tables and cast the accusation back upon you. Possibly we might find, here in your rooms, the skeleton-key which you carried in your pocket that evening. You were present, after dinner, when I told my friends that I had

a large sum of money in my safe, and when, in the course of conversation, I mentioned the place where the third key to the safe was to be found. It might still be proved by witnesses that you occasioned my stating this fact by your questions. Your sudden nosebleed made it possible for you to leave the company without attracting attention. You then remained in the servants' room for a few minutes, probably, also, merely for the purpose of awaiting a favorable moment. Subsequently, when I inquired for you, no one knew where you were; therefore, no one had seen you go into the garden. Well, then you attracted quite as little notice when you unlocked, with your skeleton-key, the door of the cashroom, which was afterward found open. And when you had finished your business in that room, you climbed through the window into the garden. Now, let me ask you, how will you disprove this accusation?"

"Enough of this nonsense," rejoined Sonnenberg, brusquely. "You will not defeat me with such weapons. You were bankrupt even before the robbery, so that people will be all the more likely to credit my assertions. For I saw you throw out the safe key with my own eyes."

"Prove it!"

"What proofs were there in your cashier's case? None at all, in fact, and yet he has been convicted."

"And he will remain so."

"Not if I speak out," replied Sonnenberg, who grew more and more irritated beneath Roland's sarcasm. "I shall find allies at once, that you may depend upon. Dora, the colonel, Dornberg's sister, Doctor Kerner, Baron Busse—indeed, all your creditors—will make common cause with me and demand your arrest."

"First, however, they will ask you why you did not

speak sooner and what reasons have prompted you to do so now, all of a sudden," said Roland, tauntingly, passing his hands alternately over his bald head and through his red whiskers.

"Then I shall answer that I have kept silent hitherto out of regard for Frau Winkler and her brother."

"You seem to forget, however, that by so doing you lay yourself open to a charge of perjury. You were a sworn witness at the trial, were you not? And you confirmed your testimony against Dornberg with your oath. You had better beware of throwing stones as long as you live in a glass house yourself."

Sonnenberg's face wore a dark frown. He stared for a while at the glowing end of his cigar.

"In all that you say, I merely recognize your wife's promptings," he replied at last. "I should have been wiser if I had not prepared you this morning for the object of our interview. You have, of course, discussed the matter with your wife, and now you are acting the part she taught you very skillfully, I must confess. But you will not succeed in that way, my dear friend! If we do not agree upon certain conditions before you leave this house, I give you my word that I shall go at once to the office of the attorney-general. It is possible that I may be accused of perjury, but that does not alarm me. I think that I can prove that my statements at the trial contained no untruth. I was only examined with regard to the facts existing at the moment of the discovery of the robbery, and all I said on that subject was perfectly true. Moreover, I can shield myself by the declaration that Dornberg's flight had shaken my suspicion, which, however, had been confirmed again by your proposed departure and change of residence. And, believe me, you will find no friends who will de-

fend you, for your failure and the insignificance of your assets have caused a bitterness of feeling against you which is daily increasing, and if I lay sufficient stress on that, the attorney-general will not hesitate to have you and your wife arrested at once."

"If that were to happen, I should immediately demand your arrest too," replied Roland, and the unsteadiness of his voice indicated that he had not been prepared for this energetic and resolute threat.

"Very well, I should not resist such an arrest, for I could count with certainty on the proofs of guilt being found at your residence. The banknotes are not destroyed. They are either among your clothing or in some other portion of your luggage. I do not believe that you have sent the money on to London in advance. You would not be so imprudent as to have confided the fact of your being in possession of so large a sum of money to a third party. I repeat, therefore, that the money will be found after your arrest. Dornberg's friends are untiring in their efforts—"

"You are wasting a great many words which make no impression whatever on me," Roland interrupted him, once more mustering courage to follow his wife's directions. "The drift of all you have said is to extort money from me—an aim which you cannot reach, for the simple reason that I have none myself."

"Is that your last word?"

"What more should I say?"

"Nothing, if you think yourself perfectly sure of your case," was Sonnenberg's reply. "But do not reproach me in the future when you are indicted. I have offered you an escape from that danger. We will drop the subject," he continued, rising. "I am going to call on Doctor Kerner now, and then on the attorney-general."

The calm decision with which he expressed this intention seemed to overthrow all the good resolutions with which Roland had armed himself.

"Do you want to ruin yourself?" he said anxiously. "You may think you have nothing to lose, but liberty and honor must be priceless treasures for you as well."

"Certainly, but I cannot see how they would be endangered if I were to enter the lists against you in Dornberg's favor. I might ask Dora Winkler what she would give me for these disclosures, but I refrain from doing so in order to appear thoroughly disinterested."

"It does not seem to have struck you that in case of your arrest the authorities will inquire both into your present circumstances and into your antecedents."

"And what do you think they will discover?" asked Sonnenberg, sarcastically.

"That my son-in-law was right in calling you an adventurer. The title dropped by your ancestor, the prospect of your inheriting a fortune from your rich uncle in Silesia; all that will turn out a swindle."

"Well, and what then? Is that swindle, as you please to call it, punishable by law? Has anybody been prejudiced or injured by it? Let them investigate as much as they like. They will find nothing which can throw the least blame on me."

"So you say," replied Roland, knocking his cigar to pieces in the ash-receiver in his feverish excitement. "I shall find out whether you are telling me the truth. Your attempt at extortion is proof enough for me that you are one of those persons who are nothing and have nothing, and make the most of good luck whenever and wherever they meet with it. And of these persons there is hardly one in whose past life there is not some dark spot. You must know what yours is. And now that my eyes are opened to this fact, I can understand

very well that you built your last hope on this attempt. I find it natural, too, that you wish to leave this place after the defeat you have undergone, and that you have not the means to defray your travelling expenses. You may have had bad luck in gambling of late—"

"I can dispense with your surmises."

"If they annoy you, please remember that you have paid me in the same coin," continued the banker, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, then, for friendship's sake I 'll help you out of the scrape. I won't mind a hundred thalers if you want to leave to-morrow or the next day."

"How generous!" said Sonnenberg, sarcastically, pacing restlessly to and fro. "For friendship's sake! How sympathizing that sounds! And how heartily you would laugh in your sleeve if you could pay me off with this sugarplum. No, my dear sir, you would not give me a groschen for friendship's sake; I am quite sure of that, and I'll accept alms from no one, least of all from you. You have made two hundred thousand thalers at this game, and the possibility of your securing your booty depends on me alone. Well, then, I demand a quarter of the amount, no more and no less. Give me fifty thousand thalers, and I will bind myself not to betray your secret as long as I live."

"Are you crazy?" cried the banker, suddenly, the veins in his forehead swelling visibly.

"By no means, I was never more sane than at this moment."

"I suppose you want the money at once?"

"Your mockery will not disconcert me any more than did the part which, as a well-trained comedian, you acted awhile ago. I would, indeed, be justified in demanding immediate payment; in accompanying you to your residence, and not leaving you until the money

was in my hands. But the exciting explanations with your wife, which would be inevitable, are not so tempting for me that I should care to expose myself to them. I will leave you to meet them alone, and I think that by to-morrow you will have considered my proposition sufficiently to have made up your mind with regard to it. Till to-morrow evening, then, Herr Roland. I intend to remain here till then, and I do not wish you to say that I held a pistol to your head. So talk over the matter with your wife; tell her that I shall not withdraw my demand, and that the whole amount must be paid to me here at my rooms to-morrow evening, if you do not wish me to call on the attorney-general."

Roland had recovered his composure. He had, at least, gained time for further consultation with his wife, and this afforded him some consolation, although he knew in advance that she would object to Sonnenberg's demand.

"I am afraid you are playing '*va banque*,'" he said, with a sneer. "You know very well that we haven't got the money nor can we raise such an amount."

"You know that I know better," answered Sonnenberg, coldly. "The idea might possibly strike you that you could yourself play '*va banque*'—that is, make the attempt to withdraw from the fulfillment of my conditions by hasty flight. But you will hardly be so foolish as to carry out that idea. In considering it you will not forget that the telegraph is quicker than railroad-trains and steamboats, and that the attorney-general would doubtless look upon your journey as an attempt to escape justice. You see how sure I am of my case in every respect, and need not hope, therefore, that you will succeed in playing me a trick."

The banker had now, also, risen. He put on his gloves

and buttoned his overcoat. There was still a sarcastic, scornful expression about his mouth. It was the only weapon he had left against this resolute opponent.

"As I remarked before, if you want a hundred thalers, I will borrow them from my son-in-law," he said. "I am perfectly well aware that you are in an unpleasant position and that you have reason to blame my wife for putting you in it. But you must not ask more, my dear sir."

"I could tell you in answer to that that I shall go to the attorney-general at once, if you will not promise me to consider my condition. But what would be the use? I know that you will do it without that, and that you will come here to-morrow to report to me your wife's decision. You must be convinced of the firmness of my resolve by this time, and I am sure you can have no doubts of my carrying it out."

"On the contrary, I have very strong doubts," sneered Roland. "Your composure does not impress me in the least. You have too much to fear for yourself to venture to attack me."

"Ah, then, you will not speak to your wife?" asked Sonnenberg.

There was a peculiar tone in his voice as he put this question. The banker, who had already reached the door, turned and gave him a startled look, and at that moment secret anxiety was again depicted in his pale face.

"Certainly, I will do so!" he replied. "I have no secrets from my wife."

"Then I may expect your answer to-morrow?"

"Yes, but I doubt whether you will like it. Good-by!"

Roland left the room. The mocking smile was no longer on his lips when he reached the street.

What now?

He did not care to reflect upon this question as it presented itself to him ; he concluded to leave it to his wife to rack her brains over it. He could not, at any rate, come to any decision without her consent.

He would have hastened home but he was obliged, before returning to the villa, to have a serious talk with his son-in-law, Julius Menzel. His wife had commissioned him to do so.

As he left the street in which Sonnenberg lived he passed a short, thin gentleman, who was standing at a shop-window and looking at the articles exhibited in it.

The gentleman wore a high hat which did not quite cover his black, curly wig, a pair of light-blue spectacles and, in spite of the thaw, a long coat lined and trimmed with fur. He made the impression of a man of rank from the country who was visiting the city for his amusement.

Roland had not noticed him, nor did he observe that this gentleman slowly followed him without any apparent intention, like an idler who is trying to kill time.

The banker found his son-in-law alone. He was standing behind a long pay-table, which divided the small office into two parts.

"I have a question to ask you," said Roland, after they had exchanged greetings. "Léonie told me this morning that you were firmly resolved to give up the villa to my creditors. Is that true?"

"It is," replied Menzel.

"The villa is not your property."

"You are right ; but Léonie gave her consent when I explained my motives to her."

"Those motives are simply ridiculous !" said Roland, in an irritated tone. "My children are under no obligations to give back the presents which I have made

them. My other daughters might just as well return their marriage outfit—"

"There is no question of that. This villa cannot be included in Léonie's outfit, and, moreover, you were already bankrupt when you bought it. If this should be proved, the creditors will make a legal demand for it, and I do not wish to wait for such a lawsuit, which would doubtless give occasion for much scandal."

"Nonsense!" grumbled Roland. "No one would think of a lawsuit; and if they did, you would be sure to win it. It is not that you are afraid of that either; you merely want to give yourself the air of an honorable man, but you don't consider that, in so doing, you expose me. If you should have children, as I trust you will, they will reproach you bitterly in the future for having disgraced their grandfather."

"On the contrary, they will tell me that I did right; and, as far as giving myself the air of an honorable man is concerned, I hardly think there is any need of defending myself against that accusation to you. I don't wish to say anything bitter, and for that reason I think it will be better for us to drop the subject."

"And I repeat that it is sheer nonsense," cried Roland, hotly. "What will the sale of the villa realize? A small percentage for the creditors, and that they can just as well do without."

"And if nothing were realized I should act according to the laws of honor," said Menzel, resolutely. "I have already taken an apartment in town; it will be vacant in a day or two, but we will not move until you have left."

"So you have got so far as that, already? You are wonderfully quick in carrying out your resolves. I suppose you have not considered the consequences?"

"What consequences, if I may ask?"

"Do you think that my wife will ever forgive you?"

"No, I don't suppose she will," replied Menzel, calmly, as he cast a glance at his iron-barred show-window, before which the gentleman in the fur-lined coat had been standing for some time. "I shall have to bear her anger, I suppose; but if she carries matters too far I shall speak out plainly, too. It might, perhaps, be as well to let her know that beforehand."

Roland had taken his umbrella from the table, and now stamped it on the floor.

"My wife wishes me to say to you—"

"I can guess what it is; you can save yourself the trouble of repeating it. Under other circumstances I should have been much pleased with that villa as a gift, but as it is, nothing could induce me to occupy it. I have heard too many unpleasant remarks about it already. And a business-man must pay some regard to public opinion."

"Of course, the halo of an honorable man—"

"Excuse me, that is not what I am aiming at—What can I do for you, sir?"

These last words were addressed to the gentleman in the fur-lined coat, who had just entered the office.

"Do you buy English banknotes?" asked the stranger, adjusting his spectacles and giving Roland a scrutinizing look

"Certainly," replied Menzel. "That is my business, you know."

"I have a large sum in such notes."

"How much?"

"Two thousand pounds sterling."

"H-m; I can give you the equivalent in German money in an hour, if you can wait so long."

"Oh, I have plenty of time. I shall remain in town several days," replied the stranger, smiling. "You lose

so much here on English banknotes, if you pay them out at a hotel. I expect to spend some time in Germany, and it is always best to use the money of the country one is staying in."

The last words were addressed to Roland, who nodded assent.

"I might come back to-morrow," continued the stranger. "But, before I go, I would like to know what rate of exchange you will allow."

"Six thalers, twenty-two," replied Menzel.

"No more?" asked the stranger, greatly surprised.

"That is the rate on English banknotes to-day."

"Could you not go as high as six, twenty-three?"

"Impossible."

"I am sorry for that. I should not like to sell for less."

"You will not get more from anybody to-day, nor probably for several weeks to come," said Menzel, shrugging his shoulders.

"And yet, over there German money is worth much less."

"That may be; but you must understand that, in selling, I must be guided by our official exchange-list. Here it is; read for yourself."

"You are right," replied the stranger, after a look at the list. "Nevertheless, I do not want to lose so much. I shall have to think it over."

"I shall be very glad to do business with you if you decide to call again to-morrow."

"I must go now," said Roland to his son-in-law. "I 'll see you this evening and then we can discuss the matter still further."

Menzel nodded silently.

The stranger, too, prepared to leave, and went away with the remark that he might return the next day.

He had not gone far when Roland appeared beside him.

"You seem to be a stranger here!" said the banker, in an excited tone.

"Did you not see that at once?" replied the other, facetiously. "Of all the persons whom I have met here there was not one who did not recognize the stranger in me forthwith, and take advantage of the occasion to overreach me."

"In a large city—"

"Certainly; I am not complaining. The saying holds good everywhere: 'Open your eyes or your purse.' I am only vexed that I shall have to lose so much on those English bills."

"Do you mean to sell them notwithstanding?"

"Yes, for then I shall have no more trouble with them. Now I am provoked every day with the landlords and tradesmen, who allow the lowest rate of exchange possible, and at the same time act as if they were doing me the greatest favor. I will not question the honesty of money-'changer whom we have just left, but there is no denying that he would make a great profit if I accepted his offer."

They had reached a quieter street. The stranger could not fail to perceive that his companion had something to say, for which he could not find the right words.

"I am quite familiar with money matters in England," he continued, after a short pause. "I have lived there long enough to be sufficiently acquainted with them. Anybody who was going over there could, without hesitation, give me six twenty-three, and still do an excellent stroke of business in London."

"Do you think so?" asked Roland, thoughtfully.

"I am sure of it."

"Would you not possibly sell the banknotes a little cheaper?"

"Are you thinking of buying them?" asked the stranger, in a tone which expressed a strong doubt.

"I might do so. I am going to England in a few days."

"Indeed? Well, then you will be able to make quite a profit?"

"No, no, that is not my intention! I expect to stay there a long time, and so I shall be very glad to have English money from the first."

"But you may not care to take the whole amount?"

"H-m, two thousand pounds, more than thirteen thousand thalers—that is a small fortune."

"Bah, I carry more than that about with me in travelling," said the stranger. "One can't tell what expenses one may be called upon to meet. And particularly an art-lover like myself, who can't see a curio or a piece of bric-à-brac without putting his hand in his pocket."

"Well, well, we know the prices asked by antiquarians here, too," replied Roland, entering into the confidential tone assumed by his companion. "I have several friends who are art collectors, but they never complain of the sums they pay out."

"Nor do I; a hobby always costs money, and money itself only gives me pleasure when I can purchase some rarity for my art collection with it. But, really, you need not be afraid to take the whole amount; you will certainly not lose anything on it; I will let you have it at six, twenty-two and a half."

"Done!" said Roland, without hesitation. "Have you the bills with you?"

"Oh, no! I have heard so much about the pick-pockets here, that I thought it advisable to leave my money at the hotel."

"It might be stolen there, too."

"Then the landlord would have to make good the loss."

"Not in all cases."

"But certainly in this case, when I gave my wallet in his charge."

"Oh, then, of course. I would accompany you to the hotel; but I have not so much money with me either."

"There is no hurry about the matter."

"Would you wait until to-morrow?"

"Willingly. Perhaps the rate will be higher then."

"Or lower," replied Roland, in a facetious tone, which, however, betrayed a hardly restrained impatience. "However, no matter what exchange may be to-morrow, our business is settled. Do you agree to that?"

"Perfectly."

"We might finish it up this evening," continued the banker. "But I live in the suburbs, so that I could not return till late, and you probably wish to go to the theatre or some other place of amusement."

"Certainly," replied the stranger. "We will, therefore, defer the matter till to-morrow. If it suits you, we will say twelve o'clock. I do not rise very early."

"As you please. I shall be punctual. Where are you staying?"

"At the Black Eagle. Here is my card," replied the stranger.

He stopped and took from his breast-pocket a card, which bore the name of a titled landed proprietor.

"You will find the head-waiter in the dining-room, and he will tell you the number of my room," he continued. "I should give it to you now, only I have forgotten it. You would oblige me by letting me have the

money in large bills. I find gold too inconvenient in travelling."

"Certainly; I shall do as you wish," said the banker, who seemed to forget that politeness required him to give his card or his name in return. "To-morrow at twelve, then, at the Black Eagle."

"That is what we agreed upon."

"All right, and you will not go to the money-changer's again?"

"No, why should I?" replied the stranger, with indifference, while Roland looked at him searchingly.

"I thought you might feel under obligations to tell him that you had sold the bills."

"Would you have any objection to my doing so?"

"I should, indeed; for that gentleman is a friend of mine, and would probably take it amiss that I had deprived him of the small profit he might have made."

"I understand! Make your mind easy. I shall not go to him again if you keep your word."

"You may depend upon that. Good-by!" said Roland, lifting his hat as he turned away.

The stranger looked after him for a while. A mocking triumphant smile played about his lips.

"The trap is set," he muttered, "and he 'll walk into it, blindfold. Patience! Only a short time longer!"

He took a snuff-box from his pocket, and in the loud way in which he refreshed himself with a pinch, his closer friends would have recognized in him, spite of his fur-lined coat, wig and spectacles, Peter Martin, secret official of the criminal police.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUTWITTED.

On the evening of the day on which Sonnenberg had unmasked himself to Roland, Dora was in a state of great excitement.

She had received an anonymous letter, which informed her that a certain person was ready to furnish her with irrefutable proofs of Dornberg's innocence, provided she was willing to pay for them.

She was farther advised to consult at once with her lawyer or her friends concerning the letter, and to send her answer by mail that same evening.

The address was given in initials. The person in question would call at the post-office the next morning for the answer, and then immediately give farther information, in case the sum of money offered in return was satisfactory.

Of course, Dora resolved at once to show this letter to Doctor Kerner and the colonel; Fannie and Herr Martin could also join in the consultation and, at any rate, a very liberal offer must be made to the anonymous writer.

She did not mention the matter to her companion; she had lost all confidence in her.

The breach between the two had, indeed, been par-

tially healed by a calm, serious explanation, owing, chiefly, to Ernestine's falling in with Dora's opinion of Sonnenberg; but the separation was still to take place.

The companion was welcome to remain until she had found another situation, but she had to promise in return to hold no communication with Sonnenberg either personally or by letter.

This she had done, and even though she did not regain Dora's confidence by so doing, the relations between the two resumed a more agreeable shape.

Ernestine, too, seemed to try to avoid anything which might displease her mistress, and thus she asked no questions as to Dora's plans when the latter ordered the servant to go for a cab.

"Katherine will have to go out," she said, as Dora was putting on her bonnet before the glass. "I should be glad if you would tell her so; she seems determined not to obey my orders any more!"

"Where has she to go?"

"I have written down all her errands so that nothing need be forgotten," replied Ernestine, handing her a paper.

"Oh, yes, that is all right," said Dora, looking over the list hastily. "I should have forgotten all about those things if you had not reminded me of them."

"That is very natural, in view of all that you have on your mind just now."

"Here, Katherine," said Frau Winkler, as the old servant entered the room, "you will have to do these errands this evening. Look over the list carefully so as not to forget anything."

"This evening?" said Katherine, sulkily, while she fixed a searching look on Ernestine, who was busy with her work. "There's a good deal to do and a long way to go, madam."

"You can take the omnibus where it is too far to walk and I shall not return very early, either."

With this Dora bade her companion good-by and left the room, accompanied by Katherine.

Ernestine laid down her work and sent a look full of spite and hatred after her mistress.

She rose softly and then crept on tiptoe to the door, where she stood listening.

She heard the carriage roll away.

Katherine returned to the kitchen, and showed her ill-humor by the noisy way in which she bustled about there.

Thus some time passed. Then the servant came out of the kitchen and along the hall. The door of the apartment was opened and closed again with a vehemence which made its glass doors rattle.

Ernestine waited a few minutes. All was quiet outside. She opened the door and went out into the hall.

A light was burning only in the latter. The kitchen was dark. Neither the house-key nor that of the apartment was hanging in its accustomed place. This was the surest sign that Katherine had left the house.

Ernestine bolted the apartment-door and returned to the drawing-room. Drawing a deep breath, she set the lamp on a small table near the window.

Sonnenberg had evidently been waiting for this signal outside, for only a few minutes passed before the bell rang softly.

Ernestine hastened to let her expected visitor in, carefully bolting the door again behind him.

"All gone?" he asked, in a low tone, as he entered the drawing-room.

"Would I have given you the signal if it were otherwise? We need not fear being disturbed for a couple of hours."

"Let us go into this room," said Sonnenberg, throwing back the *portière* which led to Dora's *boudoir*.

Ernestine took the lamp from the table and followed him silently.

"I suppose you wrote the letter that Dora received to-night," she said, after they had seated themselves.

"Yes, and, as I see, it has fulfilled its purpose. Dora will now consult with her friends as to how it is to be answered."

"Do you expect an answer?"

"Of course; but whatever it may be, it has no value for me. Where is the servant?"

"Dora sent her out on a round of errands."

"Can she not return, as she did the other day, and make her appearance here suddenly?"

"I have bolted the hall door, which I had, unfortunately, forgotten to do on that occasion," replied Ernestine, so confidently, that Sonnenberg evidently felt relieved.

"Very well," he said, "then we can talk freely. Is it true that Frau Winkler has discharged you?"

"True and not true. We had a violent scene this morning after you left; words were spoken which made it impossible for me to remain here. I hardly remember, now, which of us two first demanded a separation."

"Nor does it matter," said he. "What do you intend to do now?"

"The answer to that question is very easy: I shall look for another position."

"And you are not thinking of revenge?"

Ernestine's gray eyes flashed. A bitter expression hovered about her tightly-closed lips.

"I intend to revenge myself," he continued, in a hissing voice. "And I should suppose that you would

think likewise. If she did not intend to fulfill my hopes, of which she was perfectly well aware, it would have been very easy for her to give me a hint to that effect, and I should have been spared such a shameful defeat. What crime have I committed that she should reject my hand in so insulting a manner?"

"I think I can guess her motive," replied Ernestine, and her eyes rested searchingly upon her companion. "You said once that if you were to tell what you know Dornberg would be discharged at once. Dora knows that; indeed, I suspect that she thinks you are the one for whose crime her lover has been punished. She permitted your attentions merely so as to be able to observe you."

"She was on a wrong track there," sneered Sonnenberg, with a contemptuous shrug. "Frankly, I wish I had done that deed, for I should then be in possession of a sum which would make me a rich man for life."

"Then it was not you?"

"Did you think so, too?"

"Not at first. It was only after a while that I considered it possible."

"Ah, bah! If it had only been possible! The scoundrel, whose deed Dornberg has to suffer for, anticipated me."

"If you know him—"

"Enough of that!" he broke in roughly. "I am not yet sure whether I shall succeed in wresting a part of his booty from him. In any case, however, I must find some way of replenishing my empty purse. I cannot stay here any longer, nor can I tell how soon I may be able to gain a firm foothold in any other city. I do not know, either, what will become of you, and whether we shall ever again meet with a favorable opportunity for operating in common; so I am obliged to do some-

thing which will enable me to look forward, at least, to the nearest future without anxiety."

"As for our operating in common, that, of course, depends on chance circumstances," said Ernestine, thoughtfully. "Still I shall do all I can to make it possible. I shall try for a situation in some other place similar to the one I have filled here—"

"And what that amounts to we have seen," he again interrupted her. "No, I shall no longer build my hopes on such contingencies, and I should like to save you from the humiliations to which you are daily exposed in such a position! I intend to go to Paris day after to-morrow. You might follow me soon; then we should remain together."

"That would be delightful; but what should we live on in that case?"

"On that which we take from here!"

She looked at him in silence for a few moments, then she shook her head dubiously.

"I think I understand you," she said; "but I doubt whether it can be done—it is too dangerous!"

"Why?" he asked coolly.

"Because the first suspicion would naturally fall on us two."

"For that reason we must take such precautions that there can be no idea of any suspicion against us."

"But whatever preparations you may make—"

"My plan is matured; it will do away with your scruples. One question, however, first of all: What is to be got here?"

"I don't know exactly, but I think it would be worth while, if—"

"Please leave the ifs out of the question. Does Dora manage her own business affairs?"

"Yes."

"And how is her property invested?"

"In government-bonds, mortgages, shares of various railroads and the like."

"Has she a list of the numbers of those documents?"

"The list is with the papers."

"And they?"

"Are in an iron casket which is kept in yonder cabinet."

Ernestine pointed to an elegant, daintily constructed cabinet, which stood beside the writing-desk.

Sonnenberg rose slowly and proceeded to examine it.

"That lock can be broken without trouble," he said. "And what is the amount?"

"That I cannot tell you either," replied Ernestine, with a startled look at the *portière*, for it seemed to her as if she had heard a slight noise in the adjoining room. At any rate there is a very large sum. And that casket contains not only those papers, but also bank-notes, rolls of gold and, among other jewelry, a very valuable set of diamonds. If we could get hold of all that, indeed we need not trouble ourselves about the future."

Sonnenberg strode up and down the room a few times, and then sat down again.

"We should make sure of a life of ease for us both, and at the same time revenge ourselves for the insults put upon us," said he. "And even if suspicion should fall upon me I will take care that nothing can be proved against me. To be sure, if I were to take the casket away with me now there is no doubt that we wonld both be arrested this evening. And it can't be done in the night without running the risk of bloodshed—"

"Not for the world!" cried Ernestine, horrified.

"I don't wish that either. It must be done by day-

light. Let us say to-morrow afternoon. There is but one thing that troubles me: how to dispose of the servant. Dora will receive another letter during the forenoon—a reply to the answer which I hope to find at the post-office in the morning. I will write that I shall expect her at three o'clock, at a given place, in order to furnish her with proofs. That she is to bring none of her friends with her, but that if she wishes to have a witness I will permit her companion to be present at the interview. That if she comes in the company of any other person our meeting will not take place. Do you think she will submit to this condition?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Ernestine, after some reflection. "She will submit to any condition, make any sacrifice, if the possibility of proving Dornberg's innocence is held out to her in return."

"Very well; then you and Dora would not be here to-morrow afternoon. The house door is open, any one can go in and out without being observed—at least, I have never seen any inquisitive servants downstairs."

"And yet, you might, accidently, meet one of the inmates of the house."

"I shall not be recognized; a wig and a pair of spectacles can disguise a face completely. That matter gives me no anxiety. The main question for me is whether and how the servant can be kept out of the way without arousing suspicion."

"When will your letter to Dora get here?"

"A little after twelve, I think; then there will be no time to consult her wise friends again, and she will be obliged to decide at once."

"Very well, I will go out early to-morrow morning, and return before twelve. I will arrange matters so Katherine will have to be at a certain place at three

o'clock, to get something for her mistress. I will manage it."

"Are you sure you can?"

"Quite sure; I'll think over it this evening. You may depend upon it that the servant will not be in the house to-morrow at three o'clock."

"Then all the rest will be child's play," said Sonnenberg. "The hall door will, of course, not be bolted—"

"No, I will give you my key for it. But you must leave the key here when you go away, as I might be asked for it. You can put it under the sofa in the drawing-room. I shall look for it there and take it again."

"How about the key to this cabinet?"

"That I cannot get for you. Dora always has it about her. And I think it would be better for us if the lock were broken open. That will look more like the work of professional burglars. I hear there are many of them in town—"

"And I will take precautions which shall confirm such a suspicion. I shall leave behind me an old soiled cap and a torn cotton pocket-handkerchief, which could belong to no one but a vagabond. Under these circumstances, how should anybody suspect us? You were in Dora's company while the deed was being done, and I received a call from Herr Roland at my rooms in the same house."

"At the same hour?"

"Well, it does not matter much whether the robbery took place a few minutes sooner or later. Roland will confirm my declaration, if necessary."

"But what if they should search your room after all?"

"Then they would find neither the casket nor any of its contents; that, too, I have guarded against. Before

it enters any one's head to undertake such a search, the casket, safely packed in a trunk, will be on its way to Paris, where I shall claim it in a few days."

"And you intend to leave day after to-morrow?"

"Yes. I should be very glad if you could get me, before that time, a good wax impression of the key of the casket, then I can have a duplicate made from it in Brussels."

"Shall I see you again, then, before you go?"

"Certainly! I shall come here to take leave."

"Would you dare do that?" asked Ernestine, in astonishment.

"I don't see any risk in it. On the contrary, I shall demonstrate my innocence by doing so. And I shall show myself greatly concerned at the bold robbery."

"But I hardly think that Dora will receive you."

"I think she will."

"Katherine has strict orders to tell you that her mistress is engaged."

A mocking smile played around Sonnenberg's lips; his eyes flashed angrily.

"Curiosity alone will prompt her to receive me, if I call after this robbery," he replied. "She will wish to study the expression of my features, to read the confession of guilt in my face, and will, of course, find herself disappointed. But if she should deny herself to me, and you have obtained the wax impression, you will find some other way—"

"Don't depend upon that," she answered. "I have had to give a solemn promise not to say another word to you, and you can imagine that if I break that promise it would direct suspicion to us at once."

"Well, I must leave it to you to act as circumstances make it seem best to you," he said, after some reflection. "Unless I have the key, I shall be obliged to break open

the casket, and the absence of a key might occasion me a great deal of trouble at the custom-house in Paris."

"If I can obtain the impression, I shall do so. But how about the letter which you are to write to Dora? Are you not afraid that your handwriting may be recognized? If she does not find the anonymous correspondent at the appointed place to-morrow, and then discovers the robbery, she will guess at once that the writer of that letter enticed her from home in order to have an opportunity to do the deed."

"No, she will not recognize my handwriting," replied Sonnenberg, confidently. "Let her think whatever she likes. Nothing can be proved against me, and that is the chief thing."

"You seem very sure of your case," said Ernestine.

"Because I know that I have reason to be so."

"And when you get to Paris, will you write to me?"

"Within a day or two after my arrival. But not to this address, for it is better that Dora should know nothing about it. I will direct the letter to the post-office, to be called for."

"Yes, that will be best. Of course I cannot tell her that I am going to follow you to Paris."

"Then pick a quarrel with her and leave suddenly. She need not know where you are going."

"I 'll attend to that when we have once got so far," said Ernestine. "But I have my doubts about our doing so."

"And what are they founded on?"

"I hardly know myself. Your plan inspires me with confidence; but, nevertheless, it seems to me a very dangerous undertaking. And if it should end otherwise than you expect, all would be lost for you, Theodor; not only for you now, but for the future."

He had risen; he walked up and down the room once, and then stopped before Dora's writing-desk.

"All that is needed is courage," he said: "'Nothing venture, nothing have!' And what if the affair should turn out badly, which is, however, hardly probable? Of course, I should have to disappear from the scene for a few years; but—well! You must see yourself that this starveling existence is not attractive. All my efforts to end it by a rich marriage have proved vain, and now I must try some other way."

"If it were only a less dangerous one!" replied Ernestine, with a heavy sigh. "I should help you so much more gladly and look into the future with so much more courage."

"Don't give way to unnecessary fears; you have nothing to do with this enterprise; if it fails, I alone shall bear the consequences. One thing more: Can you let me know by some signal, to-morrow afternoon, when the coast is clear? It must be something which I can see from the street."

"I can do so. The last window of this floor, toward the corner, is that of my bedroom; notice to-morrow afternoon whether the curtains are down or whether they are pulled back; if the former is the case, you will find no one here."

"Very well, that will do. It is a signal which can awaken no suspicion later on, because no one will notice it. I trust that you will succeed in getting the servant out of the way in some unsuspicious manner; in that case I am not afraid of the result. And now I 'll go—we have considered everything sufficiently. If we should not meet again here I hope for a speedy and happy reunion in Paris."

She held the hand which he extended to her in farewell firmly in her own. Her eyes, which were fixed

upon his features, seemed to be trying to fathom his most secret thoughts.

"Dora spoke again of that lady in gray whom we saw at the theatre," she said, in a subdued voice. "I cannot get rid of the idea that she had a terrible suspicion, a suspicion which I dare not give words to."

"Nonsense!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders; but it did not escape her keen observation that, in spite of his apparent indifference, he had turned somewhat pale.

"Did you really not know that lady?" she asked.

"No," he replied, brusquely; "how often am I to tell you so?"

"Can nothing be done to prove that suspicion to be false?"

"Why? If I were to make such an attempt, would not that be just the way to direct suspicion toward myself? And how does this affair concern me? I cannot control the thoughts of others, and I do not care about them, either."

"Perhaps Dora would have accepted you, if that woman had not died so suddenly."

"Pshaw, I know better than that! It is Dornberg alone who stands between us. Dora will love him as long as she lives; unfortunately, I realized that too late."

They had gone into the hall, and Ernestine unbolted the door.

"Think the matter over once more," she whispered, "and if you are not perfectly sure of your case, I advise you earnestly to give up your plan."

"If I were not perfectly sure, I should not have made the plan," he answered, in the same tone. "Keep up your courage and, above all, do not use your presence of mind to-morrow when the robbery is discovered."

With this he left the apartment, and Ernestine, without bolting the door again, returned to the drawing-room.

It had been the highest time for Sonnenberg to leave, for, very soon after, Ernestine heard sounds in the kitchen; Katherine had evidently come back.

Dora did not return for some time yet. Faithful to the part which she had undertaken, Ernestine asked no questions, even now; she was waiting until Dora should feel the need of giving words to that which was occupying her thoughts.

Nor was she wrong in this expectation.

During supper Dora told her about the anonymous letter, at the same time closely watching the expression of her features. Ernestine was perfectly aware of this, but she had no difficulty in carrying out her deception and concealing her thoughts.

At first she appeared doubtful, and it was only when she learned that Doctor Kerner had advised Frau Winkler to send an answer and offer a suitable sum that she gave more attention to the contents of the letter, and then her doubts and scruples seemed gradually to pass away.

The answer was then written and sent to the post-office, after which nothing remained but to wait patiently for further developments.

Till late in the night Dora talked with her companion about the surmises to which that letter had given rise in her mind, without, however, mentioning any name.

Ernestine now met all her wishes and entered into all her hopes, and it almost seemed as if the old friendly relation between the two was regaining its footing.

This was also indicated by the cordiality with which they bade each other good-night when they separated at last, and even the next morning at breakfast the

same warmth of manner was still kept up between them.

Ernestine expressed the intention of going out immediately after breakfast, as she had to look about for another situation; but although Dora remarked that there was no hurry about it, she did nothing to retain her companion and attach her to her person again.

For the breach still existed, and both seemed to feel that a separation was advisable.

When Ernestine had left, Dora took out the anonymous letter once more to read it over again.

If the writer really possessed the proofs which he offered her, she could count with tolerable certainty upon receiving them in the course of the day.

And then Gustav would be discharged to-morrow!

What a triumph for her if, together with him, she could meet his enemies face to face, and prove to them that all their intrigues had been in vain.

And how much greater and more brilliant would her triumph be if it should turn out that Doctor Kerner's suspicions were correct and that Roland himself had committed the robbery!

Fannie and the colonel knew nothing of this letter as yet. The lawyer had requested her to leave it to him to inform them of it; and, moreover, the time had been too short the night before.

Lost in thought, Dora did not notice Katherine's entrance until the harsh, grating voice of the latter roused her from her reverie.

"Now we 've got them both, ma'am," said the old woman, in a triumphant tone. "You will be astonished when I tell you what I have heard."

"Speak out, then," replied Dora, impatiently, well aware that Katherine never said a word unnecessarily nor asserted anything which she could not prove.

"There 's to be a burglary here to-day!"

"A burglary? Here?" asked Dora, in alarm.

"This afternoon at three o'clock," replied the servant, with an air which showed plainly how thoroughly conscious she was of her importance at that moment. "You will get a letter soon after twelve, ma'am, which will tell you of a place where you will be expected at three o'clock sharp. There the proofs will be given you which have been promised you, and you are to take Frau Hennig with you, and no one else. She will return before you get the letter and convince you that I have to do some errands at three. So there will be no one here when the scoundrel comes."

"But how have you learned all this?" asked Dora, in increasing dismay.

"Well, I listened! He 's got possession of the hall-door-key already, and the curtain in Frau Hennig's bedroom window is to serve as a signal that the coast is clear."

"He? Who is he?"

"Herr Sonnenberg."

Dora started from her seat; she had to exercise great self-control in order to suppress the expression of indignation which hovered on her lips.

"Ernestine implicated in the crime too! The accomplice of that wretch!" she cried, with trembling voice. "What can their object be?"

"They mean to carry off the iron casket that is in that cabinet. Sonnenberg said the lock would be easy to pick, and the casket would be on the way to Paris before you discovered your loss. He is convinced that no suspicion will fall on him and Frau Hennig; but if that should be the case, nothing will be found either on his person or at his rooms that could tell against him. And so as to make it appear that some vagabond

had done the deed, he is going to leave an old cap and a torn pocket-handkerchief here when he goes away. You see it is all capitally arranged."

Dora had measured the room several times with long steps while Katherine was talking. Now she stopped before the old servant, indignation depicted on every feature of her fair face.

"How in the world did you manage to hear all this?" she asked, without doubting for a moment the truth of these communications.

"It was risky, ma'am," replied Katherine, tying and untying her apron-strings. "I think they would have murdered me if they had discovered me in my hiding-place. I thought it strange last night that I had to go out at the same time with you. I guessed at once that Frau Hennig was expecting Sonnenberg again; they might have made an appointment in the morning. So I made up my mind that though you might be ever so vexed that I hadn't obeyed your orders, I would not leave the house.

"I did not care whether Frau Hennig found me out or not, I didn't mind her anger. So I pretended to go out of the hall-door, and then crept into your bedroom on my stocking-feet. If this meeting took place in the *boudoir*, I should be close by; if they remained in the drawing-room I could steal into the *boudoir* and listen behind the *portière*. I didn't have to wait long before they came into the *boudoir* and sat down so near me that I could hear every word."

"And my companion did not notice anything?"

"She has no idea that I know all this."

Dora went to the window and looked out thoughtfully.

"I cannot understand such audacity," she said. "They must know that the first suspicion will fall upon them."

"For that reason they have taken care that nothing can be proved against them. Sonnenberg intends to leave to-morrow. Frau Hennig is to follow him in a few days, and then they mean to lead a gay life in Paris."

"They will find themselves disappointed, I fear," said Dora, sarcastically. "But how can I manage? If I were to tell Ernestine to her face what I have learned from you—"

"Then she would answer that it was all a lie. I tell you there 's no second woman as shrewd as she. She would deny everything and say I had slandered her, and we could not prove anything."

"But we must do so," replied Dora, resolutely, and her eyes flashed with anger. "Did they consult only about the robbery? Did they not speak of Herr Dornberg?"

"Yes, and about the lady in gray, too."

"And what did Sonnenberg say about her?" asked Dora, in eager expectation.

"He declared he never knew her."

"And about Herr Dornberg?"

"He said that if he were to speak out, Herr Dornberg would be discharged from prison at once."

"Did he say that?" cried Dora, in agitation.

"He or Frau Hennig. Those were the words. He also said that he wished he had stolen that money, for then he would be a rich man now."

"Ah, that is enough," said her mistress, drawing a deep breath. "They will make him tell the name of the thief in court. What we want to do now, first of all, is to prove him guilty of this crime, so as to make sure of his arrest. You will keep silent, do you hear? If Ernestine returns before me, you will tell her that I have gone to call on Fräulein Dornberg; do not betray your secret by word or look."

"I don't speak to Frau Hennig any more."

"Do not appear too ill-natured, either; that might arouse her suspicions, too. We must catch them in their own trap; I don't know yet how it is to be done, but when I return I probably shall know, and then I shall find some opportunity of explaining matters to you."

The old woman nodded, a smile passed over her morose face.

"I'll do everything," she said. "I'll even jump into the fire, if we can only get poor Dornberg free again. I have always said that Frau Hennig was a treacherous serpent."

"Is she Sonnenberg's wife?"

"Do you think so, ma'am?"

"What other explanation is there for their intimate relations?"

"Yes, indeed, it would seem so," said Katherine; "and yet, I can hardly believe it, after all. If she were his wife she would not be so anxious to have him marry you."

"Who knows whether he really intended to do so?" replied Dora. "Possibly he thought that, when once engaged to me, he could cheat me out of my fortune without difficulty, and then the aim of the engagement would have been fulfilled. But we shall learn all that, I suppose, in the course of the examination. I must go now; time is precious. Be shrewd and discreet, Katherine; you may be sure of being rewarded for your fidelity."

With these words she went into the bedroom, to prepare for going out and, with the resolve first of all to consult Martin, the detective, and hear his advice, she soon after left the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOOD NEWS.

Kurt von Wartenfels's suit had prospered, and his engagement to Vera von Busse dispelled for a short time the clouds which hung over his home. Baron Busse, with whom Kurt had always been a favorite, gave his consent gladly, but on one condition, namely: that Kurt should leave the army and devote himself to agricultural studies, so as to be able eventually to take charge of the estate. Kurt was too much in love to object to this, and did not delay to send in his resignation. On the morning when Dora discovered Sonnenberg's plot he showed his father, for approval, a letter written by him to that effect which the old gentleman, enveloped in clouds of smoke, perused attentively.

"Well, nothing can be said against the form of this letter," he said, folding up the bulky sheet; "and I do not doubt that his majesty will grant your request and appoint you to the reserve. But are you quite sure that you will never repent of this step?"

"As Vera's husband? As the owner of Elm Court?"

replied Kurt, facetiously. "How could that be possible?"

"Zounds, I should suppose that the life of an officer of hussars had its charm, too. I think it would have been better if you had waited a few years before resigning; possibly until you had a major's rank in view, and you might have been sure of leaving as brevet-major."

"And my hair would have been gray by that time, too," replied Kurt, laughing. "No, papa, what a man wants to do, he must do thoroughly. Baron Busse wishes me to devote myself to agriculture henceforth, and I have promised to do so; and, therefore, I ought to lose no time in beginning. If I am to take charge of that large estate in the future, I ought to prepare myself for it, for there 's no knowing what may happen."

"Well, well, the baron is hale and hearty yet."

"And God forbid that he should be taken from us soon; but the possibility always exists, and in that case it would be my duty to administer Vera's inheritance faithfully and conscientiously. Vera and her father are quite of my opinion, only they think I am making a sacrifice for them, for which they ought to be grateful, while I think I have more cause for gratitude than they."

The colonel had lit a candle and sealed the letter with his coat-of-arms.

"You are right," he said; "no one will blame you for your course. On the contrary, you have acted as a man of honor should act. And when is the wedding to be?"

"In the spring, I think. Baron Busse told me yesterday that he has begun to prepare our nest for us."

"And does Vera agree to that?"

"Of course, she always yields to her father's wishes,

and she will be glad, besides, to have some of the burden taken off his shoulders. So we shall hope to see you at Elm Court in the summer."

"I 'll come and spend a few days with you now and then."

"We expect you to live with us. We shall have a suite of rooms in readiness for you."

"Why, what should I do at Elm Court?" asked the colonel, looking up at his son. "Catch flies? I am not old enough for that yet. Just leave me in town here. You know I can't get along without my club and my papers; and Fannie takes excellent care of me."

"Yes; but if Fannie should leave you, too?"

"The deuce! Don't talk nonsense! Fanny leave me! Why? Because her brother has had that misfortune? I have never reproached her for it. On the contrary—"

"No, not on that account. Will you promise me not to mention the matter to any one?"

The colonel stared at his son, and slowly drew his long mustache through his fingers.

"She doesn't want to get married, I hope?"

"If an honorable man wishes to make her his wife, would you not wish her to accept?"

"Why, yes; but who is the honorable man?"

"Discretion, papa?"

"*Parole d' honneur!*"

"Doctor Kerner."

"The deuce! He?" asked the colonel, elevating his bushy eyebrows. "And this has been going on behind my back?"

"Nothing has been done in the matter yet, papa," Kurt said, reassuringly. "I even doubt whether Fannie has a suspicion of the good fortune that awaits her. The doctor has spoken to me on the subject, and I

could not discourage him in order not to deprive you of a good housekeeper."

"No, indeed, I should not have thanked you for it, either," said the old gentleman. "For that would be an excellent match for Fannie, and she would be sure to be happy. I only hope that she will accept the offer when it is made."

"Kerner is only waiting until he has procured Gustav's discharge."

"I fear he may have to wait quite a while yet for that."

"Is there no prospect yet?"

"Not as far as I know. I have heard nothing from Frau Winkler in a long time, and Doctor Kerner keeps silent too. Well, well, so that's the reason he comes here so often?"

"Yes, indeed. And that was the reason I used to go out to Elm Court so often, too," said Kurt, with a laugh. "Love is a strong magnet. Good-by, papa! I am going to the colonel's now to give him this letter."

The old gentleman looked thoughtfully after his son.

"What spirit he has!" he said to himself. "Well, well, when he has once doffed his uniform he will regret it, that I prophesy. But he'll get over it, too; he is sound to the core, and his life at Elm Court, with those excellent, sensible people, cannot fail to be a happy one."

His pipe was burned out; he took another from the wall and lit it, then he wandered up and down the room.

"Fannie and Doctor Kerner!" he muttered. "Who would have thought of that? Well, I'm heartily glad of it for her sake. Kerner is a man of honor, he makes a deal of money. Zounds! She couldn't make a better

match! But will she see that? What if she were to say: No?"

He stopped and shook his gray head in vexation and, as he followed up his thought, the possibility of a refusal on Fannie's part seemed to trouble him more and more.

"I must find out about that," he said at last. "I'll sound her. The deuce! It would be a folly she could never forgive herself for."

He left his den without delay and went to the sitting-room.

Fannie was sitting at her work-table by the window; her needle was idle.

The hasty movement with which she raised her hand to her eyes left the colonel to guess that she had been crying.

"Why, what's the matter? Not a case of unhappy love, I hope," he said, in his jovial way.

"What put that into your head, uncle?" Fannie replied, with a forced smile, as she took up her work again, in evident confusion.

"Zounds! I suppose I may ask?"

"And who should be the object of that unhappy love? I don't think it would be possible for you to answer that question, sir."

"I am not so sure of that!" said the colonel, roguishly.

"Then please—"

"No, that is my secret, child. So it has never struck you that you might get married some day?"

A crimson glow suffused the girl's sweet face; she bent her head lower, and a hardly audible sigh escaped her lips.

"No," she replied. "What could I offer a man who wished to make me his wife? Nothing but a dishonored name."

"Any man who will want to marry you will be aware of that, so you need not consider it an impediment if he does not. And, besides, even if your brother were guilty, nobody could blame you in the least for it."

"His name is mine also."

"That is true, and I am your foster-father. So people might just as well say that I had brought him up to be a thief."

"That would be absurd."

"It would be just as absurd to make you responsible for your brother's faults. No, child, don't trouble yourself with such unnecessary anxieties; there 's no blot on your honor, and if you should meet a man who loves you and wants to make you happy, say: 'Yes' joyfully, and let nothing cloud your happiness."

"And suppose such a case should occur," said Fannie, without looking up from her work; "would it not be ungrateful of me to leave you, sir? Don't think of my doing so, dear uncle. I shall stay with you as long as you live."

"Indeed? Well, that decision does great credit to your heart, but it shows that your little head is not as wise as I took it to be. Do you really suppose Vera will let anybody care for me but herself? Do you think I shall be forsaken if you leave me? Why, they are getting ready a set of rooms for me at Elm Court even now, and I think I shall be very well off there."

"Oh, in that case I shall, of course, have to try to find another home," said Fannie, with a sigh, while the tears started to her eyes again. "You are right, uncle; your place, henceforth, will be with your children at Elm Court, and I cannot live there."

"I should like to know why?"

"Don't be angry. You must feel that I am right. I am the sister of the man who is supposed to have

robbed Baron Busse. My presence would constantly remind the baron of that loss. Consequently, it is a matter of course that I cannot accept his hospitality."

"Has there been a word said about that?" asked the colonel, testily, twirling the ends of his mustache and sending forth great volumes of smoke. "I don't expect to go to Elm Court for a long time yet. I merely wanted to prove to you that I should by no means be forsaken if you should leave me for a home of your own."

"Well, that will not happen very soon, either."

"Who knows?"

"I, uncle dear. I am quite sure of it."

"Then you have never yet met a man whom you could love with all your heart?"

She lowered her eyelids. A telltale blush again spread over her face.

"I do not deny such a possibility," she replied. "But I assure you that I have never given it a thought until now."

"Nonsense, child! Every girl thinks of such a possibility at your age, and I am sure you have done so too; don't deny it. I don't blame you for it; on the contrary, I find it very natural. So, as I said before, if a good man asks you to be his wife and you feel that you can love him, don't hesitate long, but say: 'Yes.' Such happiness comes to us but once in our lives, and if we let it escape us then we have lost it forever."

At this moment the door opened, and Doctor Kerner was announced.

The colonel rose quickly and went to meet the visitor with a hearty grasp of the hand. A momentary blush passed over Fannie's face as she bade him good morning.

"Have you brought us good news?" asked the old

gentleman, placing his pipe in the corner and offering the lawyer a chair.

"I am happy to say I have," replied Kerner, adjusting his spectacles and casting a warm, tender look at the young girl, who looked up joyfully. "But you must pardon me if I do not disclose to you what must remain a secret for the present. You may, indeed—you probably will—learn everything this evening. But I did not wish to keep you waiting so long; I wanted you to share my joy at our having almost reached our goal."

"And I thank you for it with all my heart," replied Fannie, whose eyes sparkled with joy. "We will gladly be patient and ask no questions, if you wish it. Only tell us one thing: May we now count with certainty upon my brother's being discharged and exonerated?"

"I feel sure of it," said Kerner. "I expect confidently that the real culprit will be arrested to-day."

"Who is he?" asked the colonel, quickly.

"That is one of the questions that I am not yet at liberty to answer."

"Have you convincing proof?"

"We hope to obtain them by noon. We have these proofs in prospect from two quarters; if one attempt fails the other will probably be successful."

"And if both should fail?" asked Fannie, with nervous anxiety.

"I am not afraid of that," replied the lawyer.

"But it is possible."

"Then we are so close on the man's heels that he cannot escape us."

"He could leave town—"

"We should no longer allow him to do so, Fräulein. We have discovered enough to have him arrested."

"Well, that promises well for the realization of our hopes," said the colonel, twirling his mustache. "Zounds!

If the scoundrel is once in jail he'll realize that he must confess. Let your attack be a vigorous one, doctor. Don't allow yourself to be unhorsed!"

"Make your mind easy," replied the lawyer. "What we have begun we'll carry through, and as things are at present I can promise you that the guilty party will not escape us."

"Do you think the money will be recovered, too?" asked the colonel.

"Certainly, it is through the discovery of the bank-notes that the thief is to be unmasked."

"Ah, I should be glad of that for Baron Busse's sake! He says, indeed, that he has got over the loss, but, zounds! No matter how rich he is, it is no trifle to lose a hundred and fifty thousand thalers. But how about Sonnenberg? We all have been taking him for the guilty party. Is he no longer under suspicion?"

"Not as regards the robbery."

"Nor Mrs. Brighton's death, either?" said Fannie.

"Well, I have formed no opinion as to that yet," replied the lawyer, with some hesitation, which showed plainly that he did not wish to speak on the subject. "Possibly we may ascertain something to-day or to-morrow. The discoveries which we have made leave no doubt that he is an adventurer, but in that case, too, the tangible proofs are wanting, which alone would justify an indictment. However, we have little or nothing to do with that matter; we may be satisfied if we can have Dornberg restored to liberty and honor."

"You are right," observed the colonel, who had risen; "if we accomplish that, we need not care what becomes of Sonnenberg, the adventurer. He may have been concerned in the robbery in some way, after all, and then the authorities will be sure to find him out. Well, you are not going for yet awhile, are you, doctor? If

you 'll excuse me, I 'll just go to my den and fill me a pipe."

So saying, he furtively gave the lawyer a very significant look, and then hastily left the room.

Kerner looked after him somewhat perplexed. He thought he could guess the meaning of the look; but how could the colonel know anything about his secret?

He suddenly remembered that Frau Winkler too had guessed it. Could she have spoken of it here?

However that might be, the look had fulfilled its aim and encouraged him; and, as he was given to quick decisions, he resolved at once to make sure of his fate without further delay.

"So I may hope to see my brother to-day?" asked Fannie, her voice trembling with ill-suppressed inward agitation.

He looked up as if awaking from a dream, and adjusted his spectacles in evident embarrassment.

"To-day?" he replied. "That will hardly be possible. Even if we arrest the thief and extort a full confession from him, the prisoner cannot be discharged at once. The court will have to decide the point. I shall, of course, demand his release as soon as the real culprit is arrested, but I fear we cannot hope for a decision before to-morrow."

"But you can tell my brother the good news to-day?"

"Oh, of course, and I shall do so without delay!"

"Thank you, very much! That intelligence will sweeten his last night in prison. But what if your hopes should not be realized after all?"

"We will not torment ourselves with such doubts, but wait and see what will happen at noon. If our plan should fail, there will be nothing left but to concoct another one. We are, at least, convinced that we

are following the right track now— May I ask you a question?"

She looked up at him, and probably saw an expression in his features which betrayed to her the nature of the question he wished to ask. Blushing vividly, she dropped her lids again, too confused to answer.

"I know you will not expect any fine speeches from me, for which neither you nor I care," he continued, in an unsteady voice, as he drew nearer to her and laid his hand on hers. "But I trust you will permit me to ask you the simple question: Will you be my wife? You must know how fervently I love you and how happy you will make me by saying: 'Yes.' I venture to hope that I am not quite indifferent to you. But you may be sure of one thing, Fannie—that my life will be devoted to your happiness, if you will confide this hand to me. Answer me frankly. I shall always be a true and unselfish friend to you, even if you feel obliged to reject my suit."

Fannie had, as it seemed, recovered her composure. She had not been quite prepared for this offer.

"Would it not be better for you if you could overcome and forget your love for me?" she replied, in a low, trembling voice.

"Better?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes; because I am not only totally without means, but also the sister of a man whose name is dishonored. Do you think you ought to connect that dishonored name—"

"But we are going to restore it to honor," he remonstrated.

"That is the hope you cherish, and I, of course, share it," she continued, still looking fixedly before her with bowed head; "but that hope can be frustrated, like so many others, and then my name will be dishonored too."

THUS THE OLD COLONEL FOUND THEM.—*See Page* 351.

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"Your name, dearest love?" he cried passionately. "No blame can fall on you; and even if the whole world were to be of the contrary opinion, I should not love you the less. Be mine, beloved, and we will defy everything! The malice of others shall cast no shadow on our happiness. If you do not yet return my love, only tell me one thing: Do you think you can learn to love me?"

He had put his arm around her, and she permitted it; and, as he drew her close to him, she laid her fair head upon his breast.

"Do you doubt it?" she whispered, raising to him her beautiful eyes, that were wet with happy tears and radiant with love. "It was not for want of love that I hesitated, but rather from excess of it, for I have loved you, dearest, ever since I first saw you."

She could say no more; his kisses closed her lips, and they clung to each other in a long, happy embrace.

Thus the colonel found them, when he reëntered the room with his burning pipe.

At his "Zounds!" they flew apart in alarm.

"Well, well, Fräulein Fannie; how quickly a young lady can change her mind," said the old gentleman, with good-natured raillery, as she hastened to him, covered with blushes, and threw her arms about his neck, as if to ask his pardon. "It is hardly half an hour since you vowed you would take care of me as long as I live."

"And it is my duty now to take part in the fulfillment of that vow," said Doctor Kerner, without hesitation. "We will make a happy home for you with us, sir; that I solemnly promise you."

With a benevolent smile, like a loving father who sees his child's dearest wish fulfilled, the colonel kissed

Fannie's forehead, and then passed his hand lightly over her hair.

"I was only joking," hs said, extending both hands to the young lawyer. "I shall find a home at Elm Court, too. May God bless you if you make this dear child happy, as I expect you will. You have found a pearl, my friend, the true value of which you will learn only in the future."

"I fully appreciate its value even now," replied Kerner, retaining the old gentleman's cordial grasp, "and I think I can prophesy confidently that we shall be happy."

"And now we will ratify this betrothal with the ringing of the glasses," said the colonel, about to pull the bell.

"I must ask you to postpone that festive rite, colonel, as I have no more time to spare just now. At twelve, or soon after, the matter I spoke of will be decided, as we hope, and you can imagine that I wish to be on hand so as to be able to take the joyful news to my darling here without delay."

"That is certainly an excellent reason, my dear fellow. Till we meet again then, and when you return we 'll have our celebration."

Doctor Kerner did not hear the last words. He was bidding his betrothed a tender farewell, and as they had reason to fear the old gentleman's jokes on the subject, Fannie accompanied him into the hall.

"My happiness will be perfect when you bring me the news of Gustav's discharge," she said, with a beseeching look. "When may I expect you?"

"Soon after dinner," he replied. "It may be two or three o'clock before we arrive at a complete certainty, and it is that alone which has any value for you now. But even if you should expect me in vain during the

whole afternoon, do not despair, darling; it is possible that we may meet with difficulties which we have not foreseen."

"If they are only surmountable ones!"

"Do you still doubt?" he asked, smiling.

"Can you wonder, dearest? I do not doubt you and your earnest purpose; but the success of such a plan so often depends on chance."

"Courage, child, and patience a little while longer! I must really go now. Good-by!"

He kissed her once more, and then hastened downstairs and, after consulting his watch, took the shortest way to the Black Eagle, where Martin was, possibly, already waiting for Herr Roland, who was to buy the English banknotes from him.

Fannie stood at the window and looked after her lover with radiant eyes.

The colonel, who had been walking to and fro, smiled as his eyes rested on the lovely girl.

"Are you happy now?" he asked.

"Unspeakably happy," she replied, turning to him.

"And you really intended to renounce this happiness for the sake of a foolish prejudice?"

"I did. It did not seem to me a prejudice. I thought it my duty, and I expressed all my doubts. I could not know that Walter was so noble-minded."

"Indeed! So you knew that he would offer himself to you?"

"I suspected it."

"Zounds! Just look at this hypocrite! A while ago I was assured that there was no possibility of a man's even wanting to marry such an unfortunate girl. I was boldly asked whether I knew any man who would do so. Well, well, you had better not try such hypocrisy on me again."

"But, uncle dear—"

"Don't attempt to justify yourself. You had foreseen everything. You knew all about it and had kept it secret. Just wait; I'll pay you off yet! And now you had better be thinking of dinner; and, mind you, don't spoil the soup. Cooks that are in love have the reputation of being very wasteful with salt, you know."

"Not when they are once engaged," replied Fannie, with a laugh.

"Not?" said he, likewise laughing. "Well, that is a comfort for me, to be sure. But don't forget my warning, nevertheless, child. Engaged people are apt to be absent-minded, and much mischief is done through absence of mind."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MISSING BANKNOTES.

On the same morning Martin had a long interview, at his residence, with the servant-girl of the family in whose house Sonnenberg lodged. In his accustomed skillful manner, he drew from her all that there was to be told about Mrs. Brighton's visits to her husband, which had roused her curiosity sufficiently to keep her on the alert. She mentioned the violent altercation between the two on both occasions, the tone of which was unmistakable, although they were carried on in a strange language, as well as the fact that Sonnenberg and his visitor left the house together stealthily at a late hour on the second evening. The girl also stated that Herr Sonnenberg intended to start on a journey the next day and that it was quite uncertain when he would return.

Peter Martin was still thinking over the communications of this important witness when he heard a carriage stop before his house.

A few minutes later Dora Winkler entered his room in evident excitement.

"I have some information to give you that will

astonish you," she said, taking the chair he offered—"information which places Sonnenberg into our power, bound hand and foot!"

"Let me hear it," replied Martin, doubtfully. "I fear you are entertaining hopes which will not bear close scrutiny."

"On the contrary, they are sure to be realized," continud Dora, confidently, and then she reported all that her servant had told her about the interview between Sonnenberg and Ernestine.

The old gentleman's face grew more and more thoughtful; he played with his snuff-box and listened in silence, and when Dora had finished, he passed his hand slowly over his face.

"A well-laid scheme," he remarked. "You might have been beggared, if your servant had not rendered you this great service. Listening has its good points, after all, even though a listener is considered to be a contemptible person. At three o'clock, then?"

"That was the agreement. What is to be done now? Shall I keep the appointment which will be proposed to me? Shall I send the servant away, and leave home with Ernestine?

"Your idea, I presume, is that I should surprise Sonnenberg at his work," said the detective, reflectively. I don't like such surprises, they generally lead to a desperate struggle, and in this case we have a man to deal with who knows very well that he is lost. H-m, he will probably bring his burglar's tools with him; if we find them on him, we shall have proof enough; and I should like to take the opportunity to have a look at the widow Hennig. I will come to you, madam; you shall be present when he is caught in his own trap."

"But will he come, if he has not previously been assured that we have left the house?" asked Dora, anx-

iously. "I suspect that he will be watching for our departure."

"No, he would know that he might arouse suspicion by that. He trusts in the signal which his accomplice is to give him, and that signal must, of course, not be neglected. Leave everything to me; he will come at the appointed hour, and then naturally be somewhat surprised to find us there."

"Shall you come alone?"

"Yes, but my men will be close by, for in case that he should, on seeing us, decide to turn back and try to escape."

"And how have I to act until you come?"

"In a way which will arouse no suspicion in your companion. When you receive the letter in question, do not express any doubts, but order a cab and ask Frau Hennig to accompany you. If the latter proposes to send the servant out on errands, give your consent after some hesitation, but do not let the woman go before I am with you. She can then make use of the carriage. If Sonnenberg is really on the watch in the neighborhood, he will see the cab drive off, and, of course, suppose that you and Frau Hennig are in. The rest will adjust itself," he added, casting a quick glance at his watch as he spoke. "In fifteen minutes I will have to leave you."

There was a mysterious expression about the corners of his mouth, which attracted Dora's attention.

"To attend to our affairs?" she asked.

"Yes, I hope, before an hour has passed, to have the person who robbed Roland's safe under lock and key."

"Roland himself?" she asked, in sudden agitation.

"So I suppose. Nothing has been proved as yet, but we hope to obtain the requisite evidence very shortly."

"Oh, wait, I have forgotten to mention one thing: My servant declares that she heard Sonnenberg say that, if he were to tell what he knows, Gustav Dornberg would be discharged at once."

"Ah, that is very important," said Martin. "Of course, he mentioned no names?"

"No; but Katherine's testimony will suffice, I hope, to force him to tell the name."

"H–m! That assertion of his proves to me that he will not hesitate to do so as soon as it is for his interest. And that name will be Oscar Roland."

"I think so, too. But will the judge credit that assertion? Is it not, perhaps, merely a supposition of Sonnenberg's? And what if it cannot be proved?"

"It is more than a supposition," said the old gentleman, rising. "Sonnenberg was in Roland's garden when the robbery was discovered. You will remember that the window was found open. He may have watched the whole proceeding closely, and, face to face with so well-informed a witness, Roland will not venture to deny his guilt. But now you must excuse me."

"Certainly; I will not detain you any longer. Then, I may expect you after dinner?"

"Without fail; and until then be sure to avoid everything which might awaken mistrust in your companion."

When Dora had left, the detective went into his bedroom, from which he soon emerged again wearing the fur-lined coat, as well as the wig and spectacles.

He was once more the country gentleman, who sauntered along the streets as if he were at a loss how to kill time.

When he reached the Black Eagle the head-waiter, with his napkin over his arm, was standing at the door of the dining-room.

"Everything ready?" asked Martin.

"Everything, sir," replied the head-waiter, accompanying him into the hall. "The gentleman himself is not here yet."

"It is not quite time," replied the old gentleman, as they ascended the stairs. "It would be provoking indeed if he staid away; but I don't think he will. I hope my men are on the spot?"

"Just arrived."

"Very well; as soon as I ring the bell, send them both upstairs."

"And then the porter is to go for a cab?"

"Certainly. The less disturbance there is made the better."

"The affair must naturally create some disturbance," said the head-waiter, opening a door.

Peter Martin entered an elegantly furnished room, and cast a scrutinizing look around it.

A bottle of wine and a wine-glass stood on the table; a trunk and valise were conspicuous in one corner.

"I had that luggage brought here so that the room should look inhabited," resumed the head-waiter, after filling the wine-glass. "Otherwise the gentleman might suspect something and turn back at the door."

The detective went to the mirror and adjusted his wig, which was somewhat awry.

"Well, how do I look? You, of course, would know me at once—"

"Not at once, sir, and no one who is not very well acquainted with you would recognize you in that disguise. You could safely wear it to a masquerade. By the way, a gentleman who is stopping here inquired for you this morning. He arrived by the night-train, and I presume he is in this room at present, resting from his journey."

"His name?"

"Mr. James Harris, from London."

"Very well; when I am through with this affair let him know that I am here. I was expecting him."

"Has he anything to do with Mrs. Brighton's case?" said the head-waiter, inquisitively, while Martin was slowly draining the glass of wine.

"You shall hear all about it in due time."

"Oh, very well, I can wait."

With this the head-waiter hastened away. He had hardly reached the dining-room again when Herr Roland entered, and, in a low tone, inquired for the pretended country nobleman.

"Number 14, one flight, on the left!" replied the head-waiter, in his officious way. "Shall I send up your name, sir?"

"No, it is not necessary; the gentleman expects me," said Roland, leaving the dining-room with hasty steps.

A few minutes later he entered the room where the detective was sitting at his bottle of wine.

"I suppose you thought I was not coming. I am a few minutes late—"

"I have plenty of time," replied Martin, with a smile, as he relieved his visitor of his hat and umbrella and motioned him to a chair. "I never doubted for a moment that you would keep your word."

"So you did not go to the money-changer's again?" asked Roland.

"No. Why should I?" replied the old gentleman. "We had agreed upon the terms. You are to give me six thalers twenty-two and a half groschen for the pound sterling— Have you made out the account?"

"No, but that is easily done," said Roland, taking a wallet from his pocket. "Is the amount just two thousand pounds?"

"Exactly!"

"Very well; two thousand times six and three-quarter thalers is thirteen thousand five hundred thalers. You want large bills?"

"Yes."

"Then I will pay you the whole amount in twenty-seven five-hundred-thaler notes."

"All right; that will accommodate us both, and you will do a capital stroke of business."

Roland opened his wallet. His hands trembled as he counted out the banknotes on the table.

"But where is the English money?" he asked, and his eyes expressed a slight mistrust as he looked up at the old gentleman.

"I will send to the landlord for my cashbox," said the latter, who had also taken out a wallet and laid it open before him on the table. "But, excuse me, these five-hundred-thaler notes — I notice here a number which has been publicly warned against. And here is another, and here a third. My dear sir, where did you get these notes?"

Roland's thin face had turned deadly pale. He was about to gather up the bills, but Martin anticipated him, and laid his hand upon them.

"There must be some mistake," said Roland, in a hoarse voice. "What put such nonsense into your head?"

"It is no nonsense, by any means," replied the detective, who still preserved his composure, "only caution on my part. A Baron Busse has advertised the numbers of these bills, and warned the public against taking them in payment. They had disappeared after the robbery at Roland's bank."

"I don't know anything about that; I received these bills in payment myself."

"Do you know Herr Roland, the banker?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, if you do, you might inquire of him about the matter."

"I'll do so at once," replied Roland, quickly, hoping under this pretext to escape the danger that threatened him and not realizing, in his terrible excitement, that he might be in a trap which had been set for him intentionally. "Give me those bills, if you please."

"But, my dear sir, what are you going to do at Roland's? You know he has failed."

"He shall tell me whether these are really the notes that were stolen from him," said Roland, in increasing confusion.

"Then he will have the right to insist on your restoring them to him."

"In that case the person from whom I received them will have to indemnify me."

"Who is that person? Herr Sonnenberg?"

Roland stared at the detective with wide-open eyes. Every tinge of color left his cheeks; his lips twitched convulsively; he uttered a low groan.

Peter Martin had pressed the button of the electric bell. He took off his wig and spectacles, and fixed his clear, intelligent eyes upon Roland, with a searching look.

"You are Oscar Roland, the banker," he said, in a tone which admitted of no contradiction. "You yourself caused those banknotes to disappear."

The banker had sunk back into his chair. Every feature of his face showed unspeakable dismay.

How was he to answer this accusation? He remembered Sonnenberg's threats, and took it for granted that the latter had betrayed him.

And his shrewd wife, who could have helped him,

was not present. As for him, he was utterly at a loss what to do.

"And who are you?" he asked hoarsely, passing his hand over his forehead, on which stood great drops of perspiration.

"An official. Have you not guessed that yet?"

"Of the secret police?"

"Certainly, and as the proofs of your guilt are now in my hands, you will see that denial will only make your case worse. What Sonnenberg saw that evening—"

"That scoundrel!" cried Roland, furiously. "You can't believe a word of what he says about himself, and—"

"His assertions are quite as trustworthy as those of some other people," continued Martin, significantly; "and even if that were not the case, we do not need them now, as the fact of these banknotes being found in your possession proves your guilt."

"They are bills which I received from my son-in-law, for the purpose of transacting this business with you. What do you know about the numbers? It is nothing but a subterfuge."

"Not quite, my dear sir," replied Martin calmly. "The firm through which you received the money from Baron Busse has taken great pains to ascertain the numbers of the banknotes in question, and was all the more successful that the amount was in large bills, the numbers of which any careful cashier would naturally make a note of. Thus we have received a list of these numbers, and that list contains several that I find here, You, yourself, cannot doubt the validity of these proofs, and I can only advise you to make a full confession."

"Do not ruin me!" moaned Roland, who was beginning to grow disheartened.

"I pity you, but I must do my duty. Where is the rest of the money?"

The banker pretended not to have heard this question. He cast a timid glance at the door, and passed his hands through his thin red whiskers.

"That Sonnenberg is nothing but a miserable adventurer," he said. "You really cannot believe him."

"Will you tell me where the rest of the money is?" asked Martin, once more. "If not, I shall be obliged to have your residence searched, and if the money is not found there, have your wife arrested also. As it is, she is strongly suspected of having been accessory to the crime."

"And if it should be found," asked Roland, "would that exonerate me?"

"Yes, in some respects; that is, if we find it in consequence of your confession."

"Would you not arrest me in that case?"

"I regret that I should be obliged to do so nevertheless, for, as I remarked before, I must do my duty. But I should show you the greatest possible consideration. I should send you in a carriage from here to the office of the examining magistrate, for he alone can determine whether you will be imprisoned at once or released on bail."

"Can you not say a word in my favor," said the banker, clinging to that hope.

"Possibly."

"Well then, I 'll tell you," said Roland, with a deep sigh. "I suppose I 'll have to live on my children's bounty henceforth. It was a very rash proceeding on my part, I admit, and if chance had not favored me—"

"Where is the money, if you please?"

"At Menzel's villa, in and old black trunk which has double bottom."

The confession had hardly crossed Roland's lips, before he seemed to repent of it. He stamped his foot angrily and raised both hands to his bald head, as if he wanted to box his own ears for having been so cowardly.

"It was not only a rash proceeding, but a very dishonorable one," said the detective, whose voice no longer sounded calm, but stern and determined. "And it was unpardonable that you took advantage of your being favored by chance and looked on quietly, while an excellent, honest man was innocently condemned. Yet now you ask to be treated with consideration! By what right, if I may ask? Had you any consideration for Dornberg, for his sister and his betrothed! Would you have cared in the least if he had had to undergo his whole term of punishment and had been deprived of his honor and all happiness in life? No, sir, you cannot ask or expect any leniency or consideration, neither you nor your wife, who was most probably your accomplice."

"No, no," cried Roland, who had listened to this declaration with increasing alarm; "don't believe that!"

"The examination will show whether I am right," replied Martin, opening the door.

Two police-officials entered the room.

The banker started from his seat in horror, but one glance at the calm, resolute face of the old gentleman convinced him that every protest, every entreaty would remain fruitless. He took his hat and umbrella and, silently and with lowered head, followed the police-officials from the room.

Peter Martin rubbed his hands with a satisfied look and placed the banknotes in his wallet. Then he sent his name by the head-waiter to Mr. James Harris, of London, who received his visitor without delay and, as it seemed, with great pleasure.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THEIR OWN TRAP.

The information which old Katherine had given her mistress proved correct.

The latter had been at home but a short time after the visit to the detective, and had hardly finished giving instructions to her old servant, when Ernestine returned.

The latter gave a circumstantial report of her various errands. She had purchased sundry articles which Katherine was to call for toward three o'clock. Dora consented to everything, and anticipated her companion's wishes by herself giving Katherine the order.

They had hardly sat down to dinner when the anonymous letter arrived.

After reading it, Dora had to confess to herself that she should have believed it implicitly if she had not been forewarned.

She consulted with Ernestine as to the contents of the letter, as Martin had advised, or, in a measure, directed her to do; and Frau Hennig declared, without hesitation, that the proposition ought to be accepted.

A cab was, therefore, ordered.

It was long after two o'clock. Ernestine proposed

that they should start, as the writer of the letter would certainly expect them to be punctual.

"He will wait till we come," replied Dora, who was listening to every sound which made itself heard. "And, besides, we have plenty of time. The carriage will take us there quickly."

"The cab ought to be here. It is time for Katherine to start, too."

"Patience?" said Dora, with a weak attempt at pleasantry. "You are generally so calm and composed; why this restlessness and excitement now?"

"Is it not natural that I should be excited?" replied Ernestine. "We are at length face to face with the solution of a mystery, which we have so long been seeking in vain to unravel. Can you wonder that I am anxious lest that solution should again escape us?"

"Then the writer of this letter would be an impostor."

"We have no guarantee that he is not one. But there is the cab, let us hurry. Katherine had better start, too, so that she can be back before we return."

Just then the bell rang. Katherine opened the door and ushered two gentlemen into the drawing-room—the detective and a stranger.

"I have the honor of presenting to you Mr. James Harris, of London," said Martin, turning to Dora, without taking the slightest notice of the surprise of her companion.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir," replied Dora, motioning to the gentleman to sit down.

"I feel obliged, in your own interest, to remind you that we ought not to delay a moment longer," said Ernestine, urgently.

"This is Frau Hennig, I suppose?" asked the old gentleman, with a smile. "Will you be kind enough to

inform me of the nature of the relations on which the intimacy between you and Herr Theodor Sonnenberg is based?"

Ernestine's sharp eyes grew staring, her narrow, tightly compressed lips twitched convulsively; she knew already that all was lost.

"Who are you, and what gives you the right to put that question to me?" she asked, tossing her head defiantly.

"I think I might as well tell you the truth, at once," continued Martin, calmly. "You wish to know who I am? I am an official of the criminal police. And what justifies my question? A confidential conversation which you had with Sonnenberg last evening, and of which we know every word. Excuse me, you will be so good as not to leave this room, and to keep quiet."

He had interrupted her as she was about to hasten from the room; his resolute manner showed her that it would be in vain to try to outwit him.

"You will remain here and await further events," he continued, and his voice now sounded stern and threatening. "I advise you to listen to my warning; you will repent of it bitterly if you neglect to do so."

"And this is your doing, Dora!" cried Ernestine, with a furious look. "I should be ashamed—"

"You ought to be ashamed of your own treachery!" Dora interrupted her, indignantly; "and of being in league with a criminal."

"Who calls Sonnenberg a criminal?" cried Ernestine, indignantly.

"I!" replied Martin. "Even though he has not yet been proved to have committed murder, there is still a strong suspicion against him, and, however closely he may be allied to you, madam, you will no longer be able to prevent his arrest. As soon as he has entered this

house, two police officials will guard the door, who have strict orders not to let him out again. You may hope to warn him by a cry, but that stratagem would fail entirely, and only occasion your own arrest."

Ernestine had not been prepared for that terrible accusation.

She remembered the lady in gray—the gentleman from London had assuredly come to prove Sonnenberg's guilt. A sudden weakness overcame her; almost fainting, she sank into a chair; and her burning glance rested in horror on the grave face of the old gentleman, in which she read no mercy.

She heard the carriage, which had stopped before the house, roll away again. Once more a hope flashed through her mind that she might succeed in warning and saving her accomplice.

She was about to hasten to the window and call from it, in case that he was already near the house; but, as she sprang from her seat, the detective's hand grasped her arm with so tight a pressure that she cried out with pain.

"I advise you once more to keep quiet," he said; "otherwise you will only compromise yourself. The signal agreed upon has been given: The curtains in your bedroom are lowered, the servant has gone away in the cab— I tell you again, sit still, unless you wish to force me to handcuff you."

"You dare to utter such a threat to me? A lady?" cried Ernestine, in the highest indignation, and the look which she gave him would have crushed him if it had possessed the power of lightning.

"I would say the same to every female accomplice of a criminal, be she a lady or a servant-girl. You have not yet answered my question: What is Sonnenberg to you? Have you also married under a false name?"

"What put that into your head?" she asked angrily. My maiden name was Sonnenberg."

"You gave me another name," said Dora.

"Was I under obligations to tell you the truth about everything? You would have learned it soon enough if you had become my brother's wife; that was the only object which caused me to act as I did. And that object can be condemned neither by law nor by the rules of morality."

"And when you recognized that it was impossible for you to attain that object," said Dora, contemptuously, "you planned a robbery with your brother, in order to secure to him the fortune of a lady who had never shown you anything but friendship and confidence."

"So he is your brother?" remarked the old gentleman, keenly watching Frau Hennig's every movement. "And is Sonnenberg indeed his real name?"

"Why do you doubt it?" asked she, hotly.

"Because he called himself John Brighton, in London."

"I don't believe that; there must be some mistake. And not everything is true that has been said about him."

"I suppose you are not aware that he has been in England?" the detective interrupted her. "Of course you will declare that you know nothing about your brother's antecedents?"

"Why should I? Whatever I do know about him is not dishonorable, and if no robbery has been committed here, no one can be punished."

"That is certainly plain speaking," remarked Martin, sarcastically. "You consider everything, are prepared for everything. You console yourself with the assurance that if you do not succeed here you will do so all

the better in another place. I fear, however, that you will find yourself bitterly deceived in that hope, as the dealings of this shady man of honor have been put a stop to for the present, and probably for a long time to come."

Again a wrathful look fell upon him from Ernestine's gray eyes.

"If you had to answer for that insult, you could not do it," she said.

But at that moment the detective laid his hand firmly upon her mouth.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Remember the handcuffs. I am not joking."

For Dora, who had stationed herself where she could keep an eye on the ground-glass panes of the hall-door, had exclaimed, in a low tone, "Here he is!" and, with her finger to her lips, passed to another part of the room.

Martin ceased speaking, but did not relax his iron hold on Ernestine.

The key turned in the lock, footsteps were heard in the hall, and Theodor Sonnenberg appeared in the open door of the drawing-room.

Ernestine uttered a loud scream as the old gentleman took his hand from her mouth.

Sonnenberg had stopped in dismay when he saw the assembled group, instead of finding the rooms empty, as he had expected.

"Walk in, if you please," said Martin. "Your retreat is cut off. You are caught in your own trap."

Sonnenberg at once comprehended the situation. He hoped that his presence of mind, which he never lost, would save him in this case as well.

With head erect and a defiant smile upon his lips, he entered the room.

"May I trouble you for an explanation of those words?" he asked, emphatically. "What did you say about a retreat being cut off and my own trap? Madam, I came to take leave of you," he continued, turning to Dora. "I found the outside door open—"

He broke off suddenly. His eyes had fallen on Mr. Harris, who had stepped from behind the *portière*.

"I suppose you remember me, Mr. Brighton," asked the Englishman, ironically. "I came here to inquire into the fate of your wife?"

"I think you are mistaken, sir," replied Sonnenberg, who had quickly regained his composure, badly shaken though it had been. "My name is Theodor Sonnenberg, and I do not remember ever to have met you before."

"I am not in the least mistaken. A year ago, in London, you went by the name of John Brighton, and a short time since the dead body of your wife was found in the river here."

"Is the gentleman out of his mind?" asked Sonnenberg, turning to Dora, who was hastening to the hall-door to let in the police officials.

"The whole is nothing but a low revenge; aimed at us," said Ernestine, "and now—"

"Enough," Martin broke in. "I request you, Herr Sonnenberg, to hand over to me the key to this apartment, as well as the skeleton keys you have doubtless brought with you. And I also wish to see the old cap and the cotton handkerchief which you intended to leave behind you in order to create the impression that the robbery here had been committed by a professional burglar."

"Have I stumbled upon a company of lunatics? Prove to me, if you can, that a burglary was to take place here. You may be a good detective, sir, but this

time you are on a wrong track. Because I inquired about that Englishwoman at the Black Eagle that day, you think—"

"That you murdered that lady, your own wife. I not only believe that, but I have proofs of it. Or do you still declare that you never knew the woman?"

"Prove to me first that I did know her."

"I will swear to your having been the husband of Mary Brighton," said Mr. Harris, in a loud voice.

"And the servant in the house where you live has stated, on her oath, that the Englishwoman was at your rooms the night before her death, and left the house with you. The interview in your rooms took place late in the evening, after the theatre, and you went away with the lady after midnight."

A hardly perceptible pallor had spread over Sonnenberg's face; his hand, on which flashed the diamond ring, trembled as he passed it slowly over his beard.

"And if that were the truth, which I by no means admit," he said, "what would be proved by it? Certainly not that which you wish to prove. The lady committed suicide, and that was also the opinion of the physician who made the *post-mortem* examination. What more do you want? You seem to be one of those over-zealous officials of the criminal police, who scent a mysterious crime everywhere, and deem it their duty to ferret it out. My reputation is a spotless one, and I have never been concerned in any crime."

"In spite of that declaration I arrest you in the name of the law!" cried the old gentleman, in so loud a tone that his men, who were waiting outside the door, could not help hearing him, and entered the room.

When Sonnenberg saw them, he made a movement toward his breastpocket, but the next moment he withdrew his hand again.

"The power is in your hands," he said, hoarsely. "It would be foolish to resist it; I should certainly be defeated; and any struggle which I might make in self-defense would be used against me in the future as a proof of guilt. I shall submit now, but you may rest assured that I shall call you to account and demand satisfaction for this."

Again a carriage was plainly heard to stop before the house.

Martin had taken out his snuff-box and twirled it carelessly between his fingers, while his eyes rested on the prisoner.

"That defiant attitude will avail you nothing," he replied. "Banker Roland, whom I arrested a while ago, was wiser; he frankly confessed that he himself was the thief for whom Gustav Dornberg has had to suffer punishment."

At this joyful news, Dora could not restrain her delighted surprise; she hastened to the old gentleman, laid her hand on his arm, and looked up at him, full of impatience.

"Is that the truth?" she asked, trembling with excitement.

"Yes, he has confessed his guilt frankly and without reservation; and, what is more, the missing money is already in our hands."

"Many, many thanks for this intelligence!" she cried, joyfully. "We owe you infinite gratitude. But for your indefatigable perseverance that mystery would never had been solved."

"Don't think that!" he replied, with his usual pleasant smile. "You see how evil-doers are caught in their own snare. Roland, too, was trapped only through his stupidity."

Turning to Sonnenberg, who, in the meantime, had

exchanged a most significant glance with his sister, Martin continued:

"Will you give me the articles for which I asked you?"

Sonnenberg silently shrugged his shoulders; there was immense contempt but at the same time much suppressed rage in that mute gesture.

"Very well, you will probably be forced to empty your pockets," remarked the detective, signing to his men. "The carriage is waiting. I advise you not to attempt an escape, and to do as you are told; the gentlemen who will accompany you have strict orders, and it would be your own fault if you had to be handcuffed. Madam, I regret that I am obliged to ask you to bear your brother company."

"You are going to arrest me, too?" cried Ernestine, angrily. "What right have you to do so? What accusation is there against me?"

"There is so strong a suspicion against you of having been accessory to your brother's crime that I must leave it for the examining magistrate to decide whether the accusation against you is to be sustained."

"You had better submit quietly," said Sonnenberg, contemptuously. "This spy is not worth our wasting many words on him. But he will have to answer me for this. He shall repent bitterly of having treated us in so shameful a manner."

Ernestine did not take so calm and undisturbed a view of matters as her brother; but she also recognized that no protest, however energetic it might be, would be of any avail.

With sarcastic words she asked for permission to put on her bonnet and cloak, and, having done so, she left the room with her brother without deigning even to glance at Dora.

Soon after the carriage drove away with the prisoners and the two police officials.

Dora drew a breath of relief, and once more warmly thanked the old gentleman, who now also made his preparations to leave, in order to report to the examining magistrate.

Just as he was starting, Councillor Heppner rushed breathlessly into the room.

He had come to reproach his sister. He had learned the arrest of his father-in-law, and correctly supposed that Dora could give him a full explanation of the matter.

Unexpectedly, he found himself in the presence of the man who had ordered the arrest, and the latter met his reproaches with grave composure.

"Roland's guilt has been proved," said the old gentleman, emphatically. "In view of this, do you expect that the man who has been innocently condemned shall remain in prison? Keep your reproaches for him who deserves them, who, from mere love of gain, has brought shame and disgrace upon his family. Do you know the paragraph of the law which applies to this case? The question is one of fraudulent bankruptcy as well as the secreting of a large amount to the detriment of the creditors—a crime for which the punishment is state prison."

"As the money is found, they need not have arrested him. Dornberg would have been discharged."

"Ah, you think it was enough for one to have been punished?" said Martin, sarcastically.

"I shall go to Judge Hartmann and demand Roland's release. The deuce! If his sons-in-law are willing to give bail for him, the court must grant in."

"Very well, you can make the attempt. I have to see the judge, too, in order to report Sonnenberg's arrest."

"What? He, too?" cried Heppner, astonished, hastening after the detective, who had already left the room.

Again a carriage stopped before the house.

Could it be Dornberg?

The door was opened hurriedly; Fannie and Doctor Kerner entered the room.

"Have you heard?" cried Fannie, jubilantly, as Dora, with a cry of joy, hastened to meet her, and then the two clasped each other in a long embrace.

At length Fannie disengaged herself from Dora's arms.

"Wish us joy, Dora; we are betrothed," she said, in a tone full of happiness.

"You will not be surprised, my dear madam," added Kerner; "for you guessed my heart's secret long ago. I am sure I need not tell you that I, too, am unspeakably happy."

"No, indeed," cried Dora, extending a hand to each and then again embracing Fannie. "May heaven's richest blessing rest upon your union!"

"And now for the real object of our coming here," said the doctor at last. "I have already applied for Gustav's discharge, and think my request will be complied with to-day. Fannie thought that we ought not to rob you of the pleasure of bringing the prisoner the good news yourself. If agreeable to you—"

"How can you doubt it?" cried Dora, excitedly.

"Well, then, the carriage which brought us here is waiting. We can start at once."

"You are always thinking how you can give others pleasure, Fannie, dear—good soul that you are. I thank you with all my heart," said Dora, with emotion.

They all three then drove straight to the prison and obtained the director's permission to see Gustav.

Dora trembled with excitement. She was the first to enter the cell.

Gustav had risen from his seat in surprise. He needed but one look into Dora's radiant eyes to guess everything.

"Free!" she cried. "Free and exonerated from blame. Can you forgive me for having doubted you, my beloved?"

Her arms were round his neck. He pressed her to his heart and covered her blushing face with passionate kisses.

"Is this happiness real?" he asked, in a trembling voice. "You are mine once more, my all, my life!"

"And nothing shall ever part us again, dearest; no shadow shall ever again fall on our happiness or disturb our love."

"I can hardly believe it yet," said he, and his eyes, dim with tears, turned with a questioning glance to Fannie and the Doctor, who were just entering the cell.

"You may be as happy as you like," replied Kerner, grasping his hand, while Fannie, too, embraced her brother heartily.

Gustav's discharge was followed by days of unalloyed happiness for the two pairs of lovers.

All the councillor's efforts to procure the release of his father-in-law had proved vain. The offer to give bail was rejected most decidedly by the court, as it was to be foreseen that the family would sacrifice the bail in order to protect the guilty man from a degrading punishment.

Frau Roland had started for London the second day after her husband's arrest, evidently in haste to escape the suspicion of having been accessory to her husband's crime, although, as Roland himself denied this, nothing could be proved against her.

And even though the demands of the creditors were, for the most part, satisfied, and Baron Busse recovered the whole amount which he had lost, the indignation against Roland was still so great that the jury would not admit of any extenuating circumstances in his case.

Oscar Roland was sentenced to a term of several years in the penitentiary.

Gustav Dornberg, on the other hand, was honorably acquitted of all guilt.

Some time after this Dora and Fannie were married at the same time, at the house of the former, and this joyful event was followed in a few weeks by a wedding at Elm Court. Peter Martin was specially invited on all these occasions, and the jovial old gentleman always remained a faithful, welcome guest in every branch of the family circle.

Unfortunately, however, the hopes which he had set on Sonnenberg's arrest were destined not to be fulfilled.

At first the latter had denied everything, but at the second examination he admitted everything but the murder.

He acknowledged that Mary Brighton had been his wife, that he had deserted her, and that she had sought him out. He admitted that he had taken her to his rooms on the evening before his death in order to confer with her about a divorce.

He also stated that he had started to accompany her on her return to the hotel, but that, on the way, after a passionate ebullition of anger, she had left him, while he, furious at her obstinacy and her insulting invectives, had gone home.

What had happened to her after that he did not know. On the next day he had heard of her death, and naturally had not felt called upon to publish his relations to her.

This declaration he adhered to. The most skillful

cross-questioning on the part of the examining magistrate could not entangle him in any contradictions.

As it was no longer possible to verify the murder, the authorities were finally obliged to dismiss the charge. The dark mystery seemed doomed to remain unsolved.

Ernestine had been discharged from arrest some time before. There was no charge against her except the agreement with her brother to rob Frau Winkler of her property.

That robbery, however, had never been executed, and Dora would not enter a complaint against her.

The noble pair disappeared from the city; Ernestine accompanied her brother to New York. They had been quite forgotten, when Peter Martin, one day, was requested to draw up a report concerning Sonnenberg.

The authorities of some city in the United States had asked for this report. Sonnenberg was in prison there, accused of blackmail; and there seemed to have been other charges against him, for, not long after Martin's communication was sent, the same authorities reported in return that he had ended his life in a penitentiary.

The report added that, on his deathbed, the deceased had boasted of various crimes for which he had escaped punishment through his shrewdness; among others, the murder of his wife, Mary Brighton, by drowning.

This was a great satisfaction for Peter Martin. He could now, at last, convince the head-waiter of the Black Eagle, who was still somewhat skeptical, that, on the occasion of Sonnenberg's arrest, his shrewdness had, after all, found and pursued the right track.

THE END.

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